

Special Spring Music Issue

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ALL
NEW

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE: John Borkowski *** Leonard Carpenter *** Irwin Chapman *** Colleen Drippe *** Jim Garrison *** Rodger Gerberding *** Dennis Holmberg *** Jon Holsinger *** Jeff Johnston *** Kathleen E. Jurgens *** Douglas C. Klauba *** Allen Koszowski *** Lisa Lepovetsky Janet Lorimer *** Sue Marra *** Dan Opalenik *** Marthayn Pelegrimes * Margaret Ballif Simon *** James Robert Smith *** J.N. Williamson ***

HORROR FANTASY SCIENCE FICTION

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AM**



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Gretta M. Anderson
 Editor and Publisher

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2AM

TRK

Welcome again! The article we ran in the last issue, 'War on Imagination,' seems to have hit home with many of our readers. This is a subject we will keep addressing. Edgar Tatro has written a very heartfelt response. He feels as strongly as we do that this is an infringement of a freedom we cannot simply take for granted.

To commemorate this special music issue, we'd like to have a contest. The person coming up with the best list of music to read 2AM by - including artist (no made up titles), will have the list published in issue #4. Just think what it would sound like - your own list of weird, off-the-wall music. I've been contemplating buying this album with a song titled 'The Eggplant That Ate Chicago,' just to find out what kind of nutty song it is. They're coming to take me away...haha....hehe....

Enjoy!

Gretta

Gretta M. Anderson
Editor and Publisher



GLENN H. '86

FILM REVIEWS

BY JON HOLSINGER

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What's Wrong With This Picture?

In these inflationary times, frequently a picture can be worth considerably less than a thousand words.

Take a picture by David Lynch, for example. One of the Hot New School of Imagists, Lynch believes that image and symbol are Fraught with much more meaning than the rest of us conceive or can perceive.

In the performing arts, Laurie Anderson has achieved cult status by 'saying' less than she means and letting the connotation and visualization that words invoke convey her message, such as it is. Lynch, too, is a minimalist who believes that the impact and connotations of the symbols that he chooses far outweigh their surface, simplistic meaning.

Minimalists like Anderson and Lynch like to think of themselves as iconoclasts, literal image-breakers who reform image and symbol in a new, deeper, more persuasive and invasive meaning. They reinvent the wheel, and believe that their tortured overburdening of image and symbol is new, is original, is an insight never achieved before. They style themselves as artistic anarchists, forging a bold new order based on the high-tech sciences of perception and communication. Anderson is fascinated by the binary language of computers with its dualism of on-off, yes-no, black-white, etc. Her stage act is nonexistent without her multi-projector, multimedia show involving image and icon and sound and fury signifying her perceptive genius.

David Lynch is obsessed with the ramifications of bourgeois life. In ERASERHEAD, the low-budget cult film that made a name for him, work and shopping and marriage and child-rearing and cold apartments and noisy radiators became Fraught when rendered in a (possibly) post-Atomic(?) war setting, complete with mutant babies and disfigured adults. His 'dream of dark and troubling things' is horrific not so much for the gruesome yet mundane details, but for what Lynch thinks of bourgeois life by translating it into a fantastic, bleak holocaust world. Audiences laugh at ERASERHEAD. And it's obvious from his work since then, and from interviews he has given, that bourgeois middle class life itself is his nightmare. And we're not supposed to be laughing. But he lays it on so thick and so Gothic and so self-knowing that audiences do laugh; not the knowing laugh of the Hip crowd but the derisive laugh of the incredulous audience.

Lynch isn't a nihilist or an anarchist who destroys the old order in his art, as so many minimalists believe they are doing. Lynch isn't

a nihilist, he's an egoist, who believes the only reliable knowledge, the only real truth is his perception of the world. And he uses and expects his imagism to give us the same cold chill of alienation that he experiences. And he fails.

In *BLUE VELVET*, Lynch stoops to cinematic gaucheries and iconic dabbling that would get him hooted out of any film school in the country. He's John Waters without a sense of humor. Waters (*PINK FLAMINGOS*, *FEMALE TROUBLE*, *POLYESTER*) knows he's the Gross-Out King of the cineaste set and glories in being camp and overwrought and revolting. Who else would team fab 50's idol Tab Hunter with a 300-pound transvestite named Divine? Waters knows what he's doing is camp, and he achieves it almost effortlessly by using Divine her/himself. The knowledge that a man in outrageous makeup and hideous costumes is pretending to be a woman allows Waters to ring all sorts of changes on image and symbol by debasing family, motherhood, financial success, even romantic love all through his mad, masculine medium Divine.

Lynch has no such sense of camp. What was fun in *ERASERHEAD* is now tiresome in *BLUE VELVET*. Even though, or perhaps because he's made the 'straight' movies *THE ELEPHANT MAN* and *DUNE* in between, what looked original and side-splitting in *ERASERHEAD* looks hackneyed and goofy in *BLUE VELVET*.

BLUE VELVET has a Hardy Boys Mystery plot. And Lynch buries that simple, reliable plot under enough excess Freudian baggage and overwrought (but undermeaningful) symbolism to sink the Titanic.

Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan of *DUNE*), with the help of Sandy (Laura Dern of *SMOOTH TALK*), a detective's daughter, unravels a kidnapping by drug dealers that involves a policeman on the take. The Bad Guys beat Jeffrey up, but Jeffrey gets involved again. As Sandy and her father separately rush to his aid, Jeffrey kills the Chief Bad Guy (Dennis Hopper) and almost gets killed himself. And Jeffrey and Sandy live -- I kid you not -- happily ever after. Nothing could be simpler than that plot.

But Lynch is so heavy-handed *BLUE VELVET* makes those self-important Talking Heads music videos look like The Three Stooges by comparison. His 'ironic' pastorals of life in Lumberton are grotesque not naturalistic: Jeffrey's father suffers a stroke while trying to shake out a *knot* in the *tangled, pulsing* garden hose as he waters the lawn. Significant, no? A fire truck goes by in slow motion at picture's beginning and end as a fireman, glassy-eyed and friendly, gives a zombie wave. Wow! A dismembered ear involves Jeffrey in seeing and *hearing* things he shouldn't get involved in. Cosmic! Jeffrey ends up sleeping with a masochist and hitting her just like her blackmailer who also has sex with her. Oh, man! Sandy has a dream about robins, and she figures maybe that robins are, like, symbols of love, and when the robins come back to Lumberton all this greyness and evil will go away. So check this out -- at the end of the picture, when Jeffrey's and Sandy's families are gathered together at Jeffrey's house, what do you think happens but this automated robin -- geez, it almost looks real it's so cool -- this robin perches outside the kitchen window with a black beetle in its beak. Pretty tough, right? Oh, did I tell you that at the beginning of the picture, we go zooming into the grass, magnifying larger and larger till we come to this, like, whole swarm of black beetles fighting and killing and walking all over each other? Like, forces of anarchy and darkness below the surface of this seemingly peaceful, quiet town.

Now I know why Jeffrey and Sandy kept saying: 'It's a strange world.'

It's cause, like, these artists can get away with sophomoric nonsense and non-revelation and call it art, as long as they're intense about it. The Microwave School of Art. Short, internal bursts of intensity that don't affect the surface; a 'hot' (interactive) inside with a 'cool' (uninvolved) outside. I prefer things well done not warmed over.

This film, and DUNE, were produced by Dino De Laurentiis' production company. Just because Dino keeps giving David money doesn't mean you should.

The Word Made Flesh

Under the right circumstances, mental illness is socially acceptable.

During the Middle Ages, tens of thousands of people suffered from the delusion that they were knee-deep in spiders. Their frenzied dance of avoidance developed into the tarantella.

In colonial America, a sexual hysteria born of religious and sexual repression erupted into charges of possession and witchcraft, and the Salem witch trials were held. And innocent people were tortured and killed.

In a post-war Germany saddled with an enormous international debt and inflation so high that deutschmarks were used as wallpaper, a paranoid-schizophrenic Austrian named Adolph Schickelgruber became Chancellor of Germany by blaming the Fatherland's internal troubles on fictitious external enemies like the Communists and the Jews and other 'impure' races. His madness became a country's and the world was plunged into war.

In America of the 80's, fashionable, well-educated, middle-class women starve themselves into anorexia or vomit the food they binge on, all in order to maintain the slim, bony figure that our society deems beautiful and the only shape acceptable.

As much latitude for abnormal behavior as normal people have, under the right circumstances, artistic types are allowed even more freedom to be bizarre, crazed, socially maladjusted or just plain mentally ill. It is a cliché that the Great Man is beloved by millions for his art but beats his wife, neglects his children, takes a mistress and drinks himself into an early grave. And those are the artistic successes.

When Everybody is Doing It, or the person doing it is Rich And/Or Famous, our society smiles on aberrant (and abhorrent) behavior. But if you're not rich or powerful or successful or beautiful, or if your particular neurosis isn't popular or In, society (the police, the state, the church, your neighbors) will come down on you like a ton of bricks.

But there are almost as many ways of being socially acceptable as there are of being socially outcast, and the easiest way to be weird but rewarded, mental but tolerated, is to be an artist. Eccentricity is expected of artists, and the more successful you want to be as an artist, the more colorfully quirky you should be. Start practicing now for your big break. Stop combing your hair or get an outrageous, repellent hairstyle. Wear clothes not designed by humans or never

washed and/or ironed. Speak a personal language only periodically intelligible to others: mumble and/or shout whenever possible. Pee into your soup: pass out in your mashed potatoes. Father (or mother) illegitimate children. Complain that nobody understands you. Boast that nobody understands you. Nourish your neurosis and cultivate your eccentricities and you, too, can be an Artist For The Ages.

Take film, for example. If, as a small boy, your father arranged for you to be locked in a jail cell for a few minutes with the warning 'That's what we do to naughty boys,' you might end up seeing a psychiatrist to work on your feelings of persecution and injustice. But if you made dozens of films over dozens of years in which, through mistaken identity, a man is unjustly accused of and chased and persecuted for a crime he didn't commit, and usually along the way an icy, unaffected (as it were) blonde comes to his aid, you'd be Alfred Hitchcock (THE 39 STEPS, NORTH BY NORTHWEST, SABOTEUR, FRENZY, par exemple).

Or, as the son of a surgeon, you decided to work out an Orestes complex (the opposite of Oedipus -- kill your mother to avenge your father) with the phallic imagery and action of slashing, stabbing knives repeatedly entering helpless, terrified women, you'd be Brian de Palma (DRESSED TO KILL, BLOW OUT, BODY DOUBLE, to name a few).

If you're a Canadian with an affinity for cold weather whose father died of a horrible, lingering cancer, you're David Cronenberg.

Virtually all of Cronenberg's films are made in fall or early winter: THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, RABID, THE BROOD, SCANNERS, THE DEAD ZONE, VIDEODROME, THE FLY. This is probably the result of personal comfort and choice (cf. HPL's 'Cool Air'), or maybe just an artistic statement about Canadian climate; but it is striking to see the characters in his movies always wear jackets and/or winter coats, and sometimes there is snow on the ground (SCANNERS, THE DEAD ZONE). In more ways than one, Cronenberg does not make light, warm, congenial pictures.

All of his films center on mind vs. flesh, a revolt of reason against skin or skin against reason. In THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, an organism that is purposely implanted in a human to be beneficial becomes a ravenous, infectious parasite that infests other people until an epidemic of lust and parasitism ensues. In RABID, plastic surgery after a motorcycle accident turns Ivory Snow girl Marilyn Chambers into a vampire whose new, underarm appendage puts the bite on people and spreads a plague of rabies and violence and death. In THE BROOD, at a clinic where a revolutionary technique is used to train patients to reshape their illnesses through force of will, Samantha Eggar's will (and her sanity) gets out of hand and she starts giving rapid, frequent 'birth' to fanged, murderous 'children.' SCANNERS and THE DEAD ZONE (based on Stephen King's novel) are the most benign movies Cronenberg has produced. In these films, the mind is used as a weapon against flesh and within flesh, and the *force of will is the weapon* not the flesh or a protuberance or appendage or growth or disease or parasite thereof.

VIDEODROME is the apotheosis of Cronenberg's cinematic neurosis, his flesh loathing. In a sequence of events that is not made clear to the protagonist (James Woods) nor to the audience, through visual stimulus he is turned into an assassin who pulls videotapes and a gun out of his abdomen. He becomes a zombie whose flesh is plastic and gruesomely malleable as his mind and body fall under the power of 'The Church of the New Flesh.' VIDEODROME is the most nightmarish of

Cronenberg's films in its loss of control over the flesh and the vagueness and horror and *mystery* of events as they unfold. Woods' character is both victim and victimizer, where in the early films Cronenberg's characters are either fighting against the flesh plague or are the plague themselves.

Flesh can not be trusted, Cronenberg seems to be telling us. And in his newest movie, *THE FLY*, in a classic act of psychological transference, Cronenberg accuses us, the audience, of a fear of the flesh.

Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) tells Ronnie (Geena Davis) that she's afraid of 'a dip in the plasma pool,' but that he isn't afraid to 'penetrate the veil of the flesh' and become a new, better man through the use of his teleporter.

Seth was a boy genius, a scientific prodigy who is poorly socialized and owns a closet full of identical clothes because it saves him from thinking about what to wear. He tells the secret of the greatest scientific invention ever to a freelance journalist (Davis) because he doesn't have anyone else to talk to and he wants to take her home to bed.

His intellect, not his emotions, rules him. And when a trip from telepod A to telepod B makes him a new, less human, more insect man, he watches his bodily changes with clinical detachment and intellectual awe. His initial horror gives way to an admiration for his new-and-improved, stronger and more energetic body, which he attributes to teleportation, which he falsely concludes is 'inherently purging.' Seth thinks Ronnie is afraid of teleporting, of subjecting her flesh to disintegration and re-integration. What she's really afraid of is being as non-human as Seth increasingly becomes.

As in all his films, Cronenberg very cannily transfers his flesh loathing to the audience. Ronnie is the sympathetic character, the heroine with whom we're supposed to identify, and she is horrified and saddened by the changes her lover Seth goes through via graphic, expensive and very convincing special effects. Seth has no fear of the flesh, and develops an awe of his bodily changes; but Seth is not a sympathetic character. He becomes more inhuman and monstrous and eventually tries to make Ronnie merge with his body through teleportation so that they are both less fly and more human *in one body*.

Seth becomes Brundle-Fly, an anthropomorphic fly with big, almost human eyes and an insect cruelty; a disregard for human life and an inhuman, metamorphosing body. Human flesh becomes inhuman becomes not-human becomes insect, and a human brain ceases to be human and humane, too. Seth is Flesh Run Riot, the anti-entropic, gravity-defying, life-embracing force of The Gene. The fly genes that have merged with his are pitilessly and relentlessly reproducing themselves at the expense of their host, Brundle's cells and Brundle's flesh. Flesh can change, flesh is not immutable.

Flesh can't be trusted. The theme of the original *THE FLY*, that man should not tamper with nature, is perfectly suited to Cronenberg's philosophy. In all his films, human error and scientific pride unleash flesh-destroying monsters. The flesh is not to be trusted, and man brings upon himself the revolt of the flesh against order and sanity and the rightness of things.

It's a creepy and vivid and 'gross' philosophy, and it's not for nothing that a lot of reviews of *THE FLY* comment on its grotesque graphicness. Having progressed from low-budget, under-watched movies to big-budget, box office hits, Cronenberg (with *VIDEODROME* and *THE*

FLY) now has the expertise and the f/x techniques to convincingly give body to his worst fears.

And it's true that many audience members share Cronenberg's fear and fascination with the flesh, the mingled loathing and awe that Seth Brundle feels. What makes Cronenberg distinctive is his repetition, his variations on this theme over a more than ten-year career. Auteurs are made of this: simple, single-minded repetition of a theme, garbed in different settings and populated with different characters, but always reinforcing the auteur's (author's) world view.

Hitchcock has his persecution; De Palma has his knives; Michael Cimino has Men and Guns (THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT, HEAVEN'S GATE, YEAR OF THE DRAGON). There are other auteurs with other visions. But what is a sweeping vision in one film becomes a claustrophobic nightmare when repeated in film after film.

Cronenberg and the others are obviously working through some deep, dark fears. Maybe it's just as well that we pay to watch their movies, because sublimation of a neurosis through art is healthier than its expression in life.

All the same, I think David Cronenberg receives an even greater catharsis making his movies than we do by watching them. And that's saying a lot.

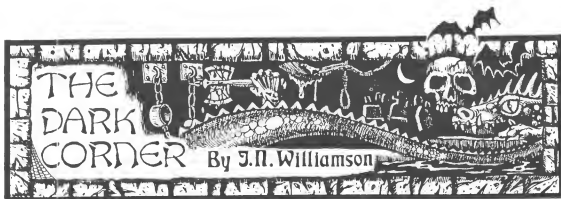
That's entertainment.

THE MUSIC BOX

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lift the lid and the music plays
 a crinkling tinkling kind of a tune
 and you hum along and it's kind of nice
 to picture Victorian brides and grooms
 drop the lid and it doesn't close
 the inimical whimsical melody plays
 a familiar song but it makes you sad
 and you think of a home that is dingy with age
 you can pound on the lid but it won't go down
 a maniacal mechanized cynical sound
 so you watch by the window for signs of a moon and
 of Gustave the lamplighter making his rounds
 beneath this lid it is very dark
 there's a clattering shattering din in the gloom
 it's just a piano it's just a new dance
 it's just a new partner come into the room

--Sue Marra



Conceive of a fiction anthology with new writing by these authors (in alphabetical order): Michael Blaine, Dennis Etchison, James Kiskner, Dean R. Koontz, Joe R. Lansdale, Robert R. McCammon, Richard Christian Matheson, William F. Nolan, Alan Rodgers, David B. Silva, J. N. Williamson and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Picture artwork by Harry O. Morris, the customary handsome publishing values of John MacLay. Now, no doubt, you also imagine a twenty-dollar price tag --

But you're wrong, because it was free.

I stress the past tense 'was' because this long short story -- this 'roundrobin' yarn constituting approximately 1 1/2 pages written by each of the dozen weirdworkers I just cited -- was given away to those who attended World Fantasy Convention this year.

Or that was the plan, when the patchwork piece was conceived and again at this autumn writing. Considering the often hilarious, eccentric elements that resulted when twelve talented writers were tossed upon the roof of one improvised storyline, one or more of us may have crept around and stolen the upwards of one-thousand souvenir-packed bookbags prepared as gifts for those in attendance!

Entitled 'The Monitors of Providence,' this nicely-printed story was the joint idea of two creative sorts. One of them has a long-awaited story collection coming out soon from Scream Press and TOR, is responsible for such fine fiction as 'Red,' 'Third Wind,' and 'Deathbed,' not to mention tv's *A-Team*; the other author wrote *BROTHERKIND*, *THE LONGEST NIGHT* and *GHOST*, edited the *MASQUES* anthologies and writes a column for this magazine. Beyond that -- no names, please!

'Monitors' elicited some of the zaniest gory villainy and improbable plot gimmicks this contributor has read, partly because, no doubt, the whole project had to be written at an incredible pace during the summer months, in order to be ready for the Rhode Island convention. At least, Bill Nolan, Etchison and Ms. Yarbro emerged with their sanity obviously intact and the *Night Cry* editor furnished a clever bit of direction when the yarn might have rambled on forever. But John MacLay, who persuaded Delores Everts to typeset it, pointed out one thing that can be said for the yarn in addition to its name value: It's *fun*!

Lord knows where you can get a copy now.

Certainly not, I'd surmise, from it's contributors...

By the time this collection of words has crawled out of The Dark Corner, the second annual meeting of Horror Writers of America will

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The Dark Corner Logo designed by Al Summa

be, as it is tediously expressed, history. And history will have been made for the second straight year under the auspices of the aforementioned World Fantasy Convention. (Was I, I wonder, the only one who came to feel morbid after telling two-dozen correspondents, 'I'll see you in Providence?')"

Just now (at this writing), I've yet to learn my exact duties as secretary-treasurer for HWA -- one utters the acronym much the way Dinah Shore used to blow kisses at the close of her tv programs -- but the plan is to report in this space, next time, the nature of membership requirements along with other points of possible interest.

I mention HWA here and now because its existence may be news to you and because someone must say, publicly, how indebted present and future writers of horror are to the handful of people whose steadfast efforts made HWA a reality. I am not among them; I merely cheered. Robert McCammon, whose doomsday novel, *SWAN SONG*, is expected to be one of the must-read novels of 1987, had the idea to begin with and only a collective preference for dignity prevented the initials from being H.O.W.L. (Horror/Occult Writers League). Some of us will long lament the loss of the acronym.

But it was Karen Lansdale who, though pregnant, collected names and addresses of potential members and contacted them, collected the first dues and, in general, performed all those necessary but unsung duties without which no organization can conceivably get off the ground.

McCammon served as the first editor of *Our Glass*, the HWA journal; with the indispensable aid of his wife, Sally, Rick also processed the votes for HWA's first elected officers. Dean Koontz was made president, Paul Dale Anderson elected vice-president.

More than a few of us have wished that Joe Lansdale, author of numerous original short stories, would produce more work of greater length. His positively ferocious novel, *ACT OF LOVE*, became a work of relentless horror instead of a detective story by dint of unsurpassed descriptive vigor. Too well-kept a secret, it needs to be swiftly reprinted by Zebra or someone.

Comes a short paper-bound novel, *DEAD IN THE WEST* (119 pp.), illustrated by industrious Allen Koszowski and published by Gordon Linzner's Space and Time (138 W. 70th, New York 10023) for a bargain basement \$6.95.

Take literally, however, the author's dedicatory tributes to the pulps and 'to comics like those in the infamous E.C. line' as well as to 'B brand horror movies' -- plus his confession that this 'is not a book of 'Big Thinks.' It's a lot like the late night horror films you used to watch..."

It is that. For those who can recapture the madcap, fantastically receptive midnight moods of tv's youth, *DEAD IN THE WEST* will be a colorful, profane, uneven, inventive extravaganza. For most of us, it's a lot of fun.

Yet for those who've read Lansdale's breathtaking, serious story, 'The Pit,' or admired his interviewing originality in recent issues of *Rod Serling's Twilight Zone*, there'll also be the feeling one has after eating Chinese. Which may be -- if 'eating Chinese' is taken very literally -- the only improbable horrific effect lacking in the novella.

Keeping abreast of all the publications, pro to fanzine, wherein fiction and nonfiction relating to all kinds of fantasy appear, is the closest thing to an impossibility I can imagine.

The people who come nearest to performing the impossible are Bob and Phyllis Weinberg, whose free catalogues are available monthly from 15145 Oxford Drive, Oak Forest, Illinois 60452.

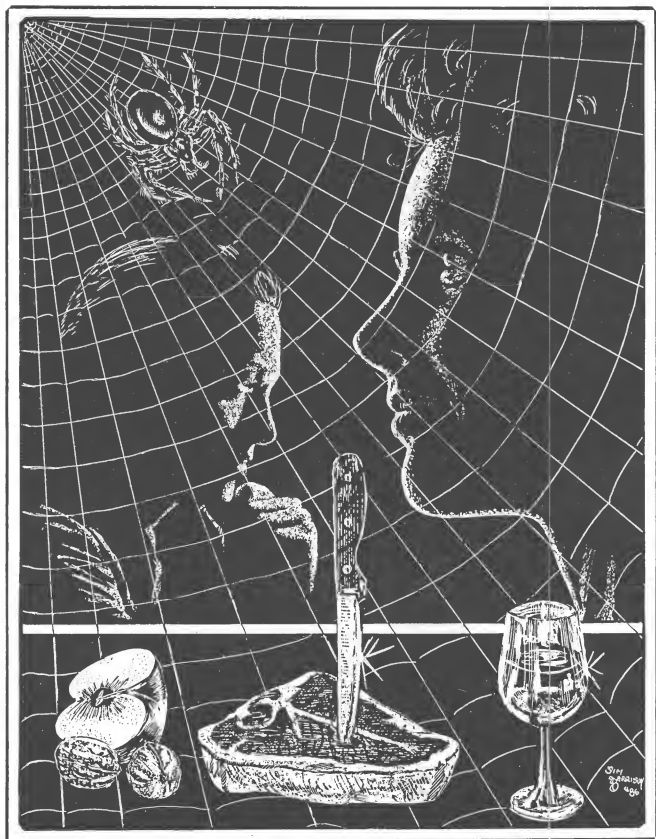
What I didn't understand as a big city resident until recently was the extent to which horror and SF readers in small towns have come to depend upon the downright readable Weinberg catalogues. A number of my Writer's Digest School students made it clear that, unthinkable as it seems, many burghs and hamlets fail not only to stock *The Horror Show*, *Amazing*, and *Fantasy Book* but *TZ* and *Night Cry* as well! For readers exposed to such creative cultural blight, Bob and Phyllis provide a priceless service.

But do you know when (for example) Ramsey Campbell, Steve Rasnic Tem, or Richard Christian Matheson have made their most recent contributions to *Grue*, *Fantasy Tales*, *Doppelganger*, *Footsteps*, *Macabre*, *Dark Regions*, even *2AM*? It is hard to keep up. Frankly, I cannot recall how I got along without the Weinbergs and there's no good reason why you should do so!

-- And if you write fiction and must know the latest in market news in the fantasy world, your best bet may well be Janet Fox's *Scavenger's Newsletter* (\$7 per year from 519 Ellinwood, Osage City, KS 66523).

In the next DARK CORNER, you'll read some of the stories behind the stories in both the upcoming *MASQUES II* and *Writer's Digest Books' HOW TO WRITE TALES OF HORROR, FANTASY, AND SCIENCE FICTION*. As editor of each, I know many of the strange tales woven into the hearts of those who appear -- with all new work -- in one hardcover book or the other. Since these writers include, to mention only a few, Richard Matheson, Stephen King, Koontz, Nolan, McCammon, Lansdale, Ray Bradbury, Ardath Mayhar, Ray Russell, Ramsey Campbell, Marion Zimmer Bradley, R. C. Matheson, Silva, Kisner, Charlie Grant, James Herbert, Doug Winter, Mort Castle, Fox, Colin Wilson, Roger Zelazny, Harlan Ellison, Tem, Tom Monteleone, and Robert Bloch, you may find parts of it interesting.





The Natural Way

by Janet Lorimer

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'I love being pregnant,' Laura said. She ran her hands over her breasts, cupping and lifting them, making them look fuller, as if swollen with rich milk. 'It's so...natural,' she said, and she smiled her secret smile.

Bob drew himself up sharply in the bed. Since they had, just moments before, parted from their lovemaking, he found her comments disconcerting. 'Stop that!' he said harshly. 'Stop talking like that! You make it sound like you're pregnant now.'

'I might be,' she said, and her eyes sparkled. 'This very moment I might be.'

Bob glared at her. 'I thought you took precautions,' he snapped, sudden worry dissolving the contented warmth he'd felt just before they parted.

'Oh, no!' Laura threw back her head and laughed. 'I don't believe in artificial things. I like the natural way.'

Bob pulled the covers up around his waist and reached over to the nightstand where he'd left his cigarettes and lighter. With shaking fingers, he pulled out a cigarette and lit it, his earlier mood thoroughly ruined.

Why the hell had Laura said that? He thought about jumping out of the warm bed to pull on his clothes, to stamp out into the raw wind and chilly rain that lashed the house. Back to his own place, cold and empty and unwelcoming. Damn! All he'd wanted was companionship, her body snuggled up against his, falling asleep in the safety of this warm room while the storm raged outside. What he didn't want was the unsettling thought that she might be pregnant. And on this, the first night they'd made love!

'Would you like some wine?' she said, breaking into his uneasy thoughts.

He blinked at her in surprise. 'I didn't know you drank.'

'I don't, but I keep wine for my guests. It's homemade. I made it myself from flowers and herbs. Wait! I'll bring you some. You'll like it!'

He took another reflective drag on his cigarette and squinted at her through the smoke. Maybe things were going to be all right after all. Maybe their lovemaking had just temporarily loosened her tongue. Still, any talk of pregnancy was bound to set a guy's nerves on edge. She should know better.

She slipped from the bed and picked up her robe. Like many of her clothes it was faded and patched, but the way she slid her arms

into the sleeves made Bob think of silk.

They'd met two weeks before at the little grocery store down the block. Laura sold homemade pies to the owner of the store who, in turn, marked up the price to twice what he paid Laura and then resold them. But they were worth every penny! Crust as light and flaky as air, baked a golden brown, the thick sweet juices from the fruit oozing out of the little slits in the top. When you bit into a piece of Laura's pie, you knew what you were eating -- apple, berry, cherry -- without having to read the label on the box.

He'd felt drawn to her the moment he saw her, which was odd, considering that Laura was a big woman and Bob, stocky but on the short side, usually had to arm-wrestle his ego on the subject of a woman's height. Not a big woman, he amended, but taller than he, by an inch or two. Slender, with full breasts, large grey eyes, a wide smile. He shivered involuntarily, thinking about that enigmatic smile. It made her whole face glow. It should have been called beautiful, but there was something rather secretive about it that Bob found disconcerting.

It wasn't just her looks that had attracted him, there was something else he couldn't quite put his finger on. She wore no make-up and her clothes weren't spectacular, but there was something....

They'd started talking in the grocery store, hadn't stopped till they suddenly realized where they were and what time it was and that they both had other things to do. Then, just as suddenly, those things hadn't seemed important anymore, and they wanted to go on talking, just being together.

'How about dinner and a movie?' Bob had asked, hoping against hope that she didn't have a husband lurking somewhere in the wings.

She'd looked coyly at him from under those dark, thick lashes and smiled. 'I have a better idea,' she'd said. 'Why don't you come home to my house for dinner. Would you like a home cooked meal, Bob?'

Like it! It seemed an era since he'd had a home cooked meal! Not since before his marriage and that had ended six years ago. He felt bitter about it even now. Three years with a woman who wanted a career, trading her femininity for a briefcase and a paycheck. It wasn't that he was a lazy slob who wanted a wife to wait on him all the time, but after a hard day, a man likes to come home to a reasonably clean house and a hot meal, not a frozen TV dinner he has to heat up himself.

And then, of course, there was the subject of children, always a sore spot between them. Bob liked kids, wanted a family, but his wife had a thousand good reasons for saying no. In the end, he'd left her rather than prolong the pain and disappointment.

Thinking about his ex-wife reminded Bob of what Laura had said earlier, about the possibility that she was pregnant. Maybe he shouldn't have snapped at her like that, but the idea had startled him because they'd known each other for such a short time.

That first night he'd come for dinner, feeling a little nervous and self-conscious when he handed her a bouquet of carnations. He didn't know if she liked carnations, or flowers in general, but most women did. Still, it had been a long time since he'd given a lady flowers and he felt like some gawky teenager, arriving to pick up a date for the prom.

She'd loved the flowers, burying her face in their spicy scent, her long dark hair swinging over the blossoms like a black silk curtain. That's when he learned that she loved natural things.

'Home grown fruits and vegetables,' she'd told him. 'Homemade quilts and braided rugs. Bread dough rising on the back of the stove and the smell of preserves bubbling away in an old black pot.' She smiled. 'Potpourri and pomander balls to scent the drawers and closets. It's the natural way and that's how I'm raising my children.'

'Children?' His ears had almost come to a point.

'Didn't I tell you about my children?'

'No,' he said very carefully. 'I don't believe you did.'

'Goodness!' she laughed. 'We talked about so many things this morning, I thought sure I'd mentioned them. They're very precious to me.'

'I didn't know you were married,' he said. Her ring finger was bare.

'I'm not.' A timer went off in the kitchen. 'Dinner's ready. I hope you don't mind if we eat in the kitchen. It's cozier there, less formal.'

It was a big old-fashioned kitchen with a high ceiling and yards of green tile counters. The linoleum was cracked, there were water stains on the wallpaper around the window, and the appliances were outdated, but it was spotlessly clean.

They ate dinner at the kitchen table, a rickety second-hand monstrosity that wobbled because one leg was too long or too short. He made a mental note to offer to fix it for her. And caulk that window! Looked like she could use a man around the house.

She brought enough food to the table to feed an army! Loaves of freshly baked bread, hot from the oven, steam rising from their golden crowns. A roast, fork tender, with oven-baked potatoes dripping with thick, rich gravy. Baked apples, their hollowed out cores stuffed with cinnamon, raisins, and nuts. Garden vegetables, melted butter pooling around their steaming succulence. And a variety of desserts, from her famous pie to a rich, buttery cake that melted in his mouth. He hadn't eaten like this in...he had never eaten like this, he amended, not even at his mother's table!

Halfway through dinner he asked her where the children were. She said they'd been fed earlier and put to bed. They were exceptionally well-behaved kids, he decided, because he hadn't heard a peep all evening.

They did not make love that first night. Somehow Bob felt it would be crude to move in on Laura like that so soon. There was an aura of modesty about her that made him want to hold back. But it was okay because he found he enjoyed her company and, for the moment, that was enough.

He came to dinner the next night because Laura invited him, insisting on it. 'I love to cook,' she said.

He accepted because he couldn't resist the invitation, but he felt uncomfortable, wanting to do something to show his gratitude, to help pay for the food he was consuming. Heaven knows, he thought, what the food must cost her. Maybe not the fruits and vegetables because they came from her garden. But certainly all that meat!

He came the next day and fixed her table and caulked her window. There were other odd jobs, too. A leaky faucet in the bathroom, a loose railing on the porch, and masses of spider webs in the dark corners of the high ceilings.

The webs surprised Bob because Laura was so neat. He couldn't imagine her letting something as filthy as spider webs accumulate.

Then he thought that perhaps she was afraid to knock them down. Women were often squeamish about crawly things. But when he got the broom and started to sweep the webs away, Laura cried out, almost as if she were in pain. 'Don't!'

He stopped, turned to stare at her in disbelief. 'You don't want those things in the house, Laura. Some spiders are poisonous, you know. You wouldn't want one of the kids to get bit.'

'They won't hurt us,' she cried, her eyes welling with tears. 'They never have, they never will. We leave them alone and they leave us alone. They're good, Bob! They eat flies, you know. We co-exist. It's the natural way.'

He shook his head as he put the broom away. This was one lady he just couldn't figure.

At dinner that night he asked her about her past. Where had she come from? Had she ever been married? Where was she going from here? He hoped the answers would shed some light on her puzzling personality. But they were surprisingly ordinary.

She had been married once, she said. It was a long time ago and didn't matter anymore. Her husband had left her. She didn't say why and Bob didn't want to pry because it seemed to be a subject she wanted to avoid. When she talked about her marriage, her face became lifeless, something carved from pale stone.

'I was young,' she said in a flat voice. 'I didn't know how young I really was. I thought I knew, thought I understood what men were all about, what marriage was supposed to mean and what wives were supposed to be.'

She'd quit college to get married, had gone to work to put her husband through school. It had been a tough time, but they seemed to be managing. Success for them both lay on the other side. They could have it all, he told her. He graduated from college and his wife at about the same time.

'We had the children then,' she said. 'He'd wanted it all, you see. His education, a wife, and children. Or so he led me to believe!' Her face contorted with pain at the bitter memories. 'When he left, I was nearly paralyzed with fear. I didn't know how to make it on my own. There I was, all alone with small children and no job skills. I'd worked as a waitress the whole time, you see. It was the only job I could get! But then, with the children to care for all by myself, I didn't want to keep working as a waitress. I didn't want to dump them in daycare centers and I didn't want to go on welfare, either. There had to be another way. I just knew there had to be another way!'

She quit her job and started taking part-time jobs to bring in enough money to cover expenses. She cleaned houses for a real estate agency, baked and sold her pies, took in laundry and ironing, worked as a seamstress. 'Anything,' she said fiercely, 'to cover the bills. Anything that allowed me time with my children and supported us, too.'

She smiled suddenly and Bob was shocked. It wasn't the smile of a woman who feels sad or bitter or resentful; rather it was that smile that played over her lips and into her eyes, that Mona Lisa smile that suggested she had a secret. It made Bob uneasy.

'That's when I discovered the natural way,' she said. 'I learned that if you study nature, you learn how to survive.'

Bob wasn't at all sure what she meant, but he didn't want to tell her that. He didn't want her to explain. The subject was somehow

eerie. Maybe it was because Laura always smiled when she talked about the natural way.

He stubbed his cigarette out in the ashtray and nestled down against the pillows, eyes on the ceiling, listening to the rain tap-dance on the window, thinking about Laura. Well, what if she was pregnant? It wouldn't be so bad for him, would it? He had a responsibility, of course, but Bob wasn't a shirker. Okay, so maybe they'd even get married. And, okay, so she already had kids, but they were good kids. Bob liked them. He grinned at the thought of instant fatherhood. He'd play ball with the boys, take the girls to the zoo and the park. He let his thoughts drift into a fantasy world of children and ice cream cones and teddy bears....

Laura came into the bedroom holding a bottle of amber liquid and a glass. 'Sorry I took so long,' she said. 'I wanted to check the children. They're fine, sound asleep.'

'They're good kids,' Bob said, holding the glass while she poured the wine. He sniffed. It smelled sweet, almost too sweet, like sherry. Bob preferred a dry wine, but still, he was curious. He took a tentative sip and a thousand delicate sun-burst flavors exploded on his tongue. 'Hey, that's pretty good,' he said with a grin. 'Maybe you ought to sell your wine, too!'

She laughed, crawling back onto the bed and cuddling up against him. The robe fell open and her thigh, warm and downy soft, touched his leg. The feel of her skin, the scent of her clean, dark hair, the warmth of her nearness aroused him again. He reached down and stroked her thigh.

Two weeks! It had taken him two weeks to get Laura to make love with him. A slow, sensuous maneuvering. Lots of little things, their hands touching when they walked together, a quick kiss stolen when he said goodnight the first night, a longer, deeper kiss the next night, and then...tonight! But it had been well worth the wait! Her dark hair spread over the pillow, her grey eyes wide with love and longing, her musky fragrance filling his nostrils....

He yawned, a real jaw cracker. The wine must be making him sleepy. Funny, wine didn't usually have that effect. 'How do you make this stuff?' he said, surprised to hear a slur in his words.

'I told you,' she said in a low voice. 'Herbs and flowers. In the spring, the children and I go to the country. We take a picnic lunch and spend the whole day finding the right plants. It's all made from natural things.'

'S good,' he said thickly.

'Have some more,' Laura said, tipping the bottle over the glass. The amber liquid splashed in, a golden waterfall of spring memories.

Bob drank deeply, loving the cool sweetness that poured down his throat. What a woman Laura was! Great lover, great housekeeper, great cook! Why, in the last two weeks, he'd put on at least thirty pounds! He'd be a damn fool to pass this woman up.

He yawned again, his eyelids drooping. The timbers of the old house creaked softly. The clock ticked on the dresser, a hypnotic rhythm that kept time with his breathing. Carried on the gentle wings of the wine, Bob's waking dreams became sleeping dreams.

Laura gently pulled the empty glass from his limp fingers and set it on the nightstand. She propped herself up higher on the pillows, watching him drift into deep sleep. Her finger tips massaged his forehead lightly. Her features were cloaked in serenity, but her

mind raced.

She'd come very close to spoiling the mood and perhaps losing him when she'd talked about pregnancy. She rubbed her belly tenderly, thinking about the new little one. She shouldn't have mentioned it, even teasingly, but Bob had started to become rather special. That worried her. Her survival and the survival of her children depended on her ability to keep a cool head. She'd become emotionally involved. She didn't dare risk making that mistake again. Next time she'd have to cut the courtship time down.

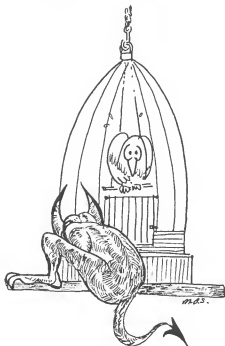
She thought of the children, wrapped in their beds, securely asleep. Her heart nearly ached with the great love she felt for them and for her unborn child. It was this love and her fear for their welfare that now turned her feelings for Bob into splinters of ice.

Looking down at his sleeping form, her wide grey eyes were as cold as the North Sea. Now she had the impetus to do what had to be done. She pushed the pillow over his face, feeling his weak struggles dispassionately. The wine, brewed from nature's pharmacopeia, had done its job again.

When it was over, she half rolled, half dragged the sheet-cocooned body to the kitchen. Everything was ready for this night's work -- the knife newly sharpened, the large squares of butcher paper laid out in tidy piles, the labels neatly lettered. She must be careful to label the packages correctly. She wouldn't want to mistake stew meat for a roast at some later date.

She picked up the knife and her glance strayed upward to the dark webs in the shadowy corners. Her lips moved in a silent expression of gratitude to her arachnid 'sisters' who had taught her so well. Their babies, like her own children, depended on their mothers for survival. And the mothers, in turn, depended on their own Mother. The knife blade caught the light and gleamed.

It is not for nothing that nature is called Mother, the wise Mother who teaches her secrets of survival to her daughters. And wonderfully clever are the daughters who listen and learn. It is the natural way.



Kathleen Jurgens interviews



Crematia Mortum

What follows is a telephone interview with Roberta Solomon, alias Crematia Mortum, conducted on November 25, 1985. Yes, she's still in business on Kansas City's KSHB-TV as of last Friday night's horror movie.

KEJ: Growing up, were you encouraged to seek employment as a late night horror hostess or were your ambitions quite different?

CM: Actually, Crematia evolved like mold grows: I was hired for a program called 'All Night Live,' which I did for eight months. The show wasn't tying in the comedy elements with the monster movies we showed. Realizing this, my director and I went shopping. We bought junk in antique shops -- ugly things -- and also Olga lingere (I wash the lingerie every week!).

My wig comes from Wild Wooley's, a discount store. It's replaced every few months. I can tell when I need a new one, the old one begins to shed and develop bald patches.

KEJ: Why the sexy, sensuous Crematia and not an Igora or Hydra? Did you create the character?

CM: I wanted to do something funny and off-the-wall. I don't see Crematia as sexy, and I don't want her to be frightening. She's intelligent, has flair but isn't in complete touch with reality.

I can't get serious about this or I'd be dead meat. I mean, if the ratings get bad, we'll be off the air.

KEJ: What background training did you have before Crematia entered your life?

CM: In high school, I was very active in theatre. I was a biology major in college, until discovering organic chemistry was impossible for anyone to pass. Twelve hours away from a degree in theatre, I was offered a lead in the traveling production of HAIR, out of Chicago.

I dislike moving, living out of a suitcase, and subsequently, turned down the role. I cried for two weeks. A friend asked if I wanted to audition for the college campus radio station. I got the job; I was also waiting tables at the time. Later, I met a man who told me to audition for KMBR Radio. I've been there seven years. Through my radio work, I met a guy from the TV station.

KEJ: Writing your scripts, how much freedom do you have? Are they combined efforts?

CM: I go into the studio on Monday evening and watch the movie to know where the commercial breaks will be. Together, the director and I, work on jokes, ideas, etc. We tape on Wednesday. It's 'seat of the pants' TV -- we don't want to look slick. We look cheap and local. I can make very current references to what's happening in the Kansas City area.

KEJ: Name your favorite horror flicks, your favorite stinkaroos.

CM: My all-time favorite is Julie Harris in THE HAUNTING, based on Shirley Jackson's novel THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE. Others are: the original INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. ALIEN was incredibly suspenseful (If it advances the film, I don't mind violence). I watched most of ALIEN from behind the coffee table, under an afghan. THE HOWLING was good, without gratuitous violence.

Japanese movies are the worst. In DESTROY ALL MONSTERS, you can actually see the strings on the airplanes. THE GIANT CLAW -- ugh! DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS was awful -- mutant plants sucking human body fluids.

KEJ: What is it like for Mr. Crematia? How does your husband respond to a celebrity marriage?

CM: He's very understanding and contributes a lot of ideas and jokes for scripts. It's really odd being out in public dressed as Roberta, not Crematia. People stare, trying to figure out where they know me from. Jim, my husband, is also recognizable in the Kansas City area. He's also an announcer on KMER Radio. He's not at all jealous; in fact, he finds the whole thing funny.

KEJ: What kind of public relations work, personal appearances are required of Crematia?

CM: Crematia's a lot like Santa Claus -- she's not seen a whole lot. I want her to stay a fantasy character. Up close, you can see the wig, the make-up (I wear almost full body make-up in clown white. It takes an hour to put on and an hour to remove). I do 4 to 5 appearances per year.

KEJ: Who is your audience?

CM: Most audiences are so normal, it's surprising. They're friendly, even respectful. The reason we're successful is that we don't take this seriously. We poke fun, direct sarcasm at the movies.

I've played Crematia for four years. People watch the show because there's nothing else on. The show receives letters from all over: from students at the University in Columbia, Missouri (where I have a cult following); from prisoners serving time in Leavenworth Penitentiary; from bank presidents; business people.

KEJ: What's the best part of being Crematia?

CM: It's really weird how differently my mind works when I'm Crematia, not Roberta. Suddenly, Crematia's voice rumbles out. I think differently, from a different angle. Every week I have the rare opportunity to go nuts.

I enjoy trying to come up with new jokes every week. The spontaneity is terrific. Even with eleven or twelve people having input in the show, it's always happy on the set.

KEJ: When you aren't Crematia, you're Roberta. Who is she?

CM: I'm the AM newscaster (6 AM-3PM) for KMBR. I've done a few free-lance commercials and some voice-overs on radio. My face is not 'marketable,' which is not bad. When you become identified with a product, it limits opportunities for offers from other advertisers. I also enjoy my privacy.

I'm big on gardening: bulbs, flowers, digging in the dirt, the whole bit. I also build clocks, embroider, do needlework.

KEJ: I've never met Roberta Solomon in person. It's likely that I'd pass her on the street without recognizing her. But I do know Crematia Mortum.

It's Friday night. Your spouse is asleep in the Lazy Boy. The kids have been in bed for two hours. The TV offerings at 11 PM are dismal -- reruns of JOHNNY, reruns of HAWAII FIVE-O, reruns of (agh!) THE DONNA REED SHOW.

You are a creature of the night. The first slice of sunlight, the first bird's song in the morning causes your blood pressure to drop, sets your stomach churning. It's 11 PM and you have at least two, maybe three, good hours left to you before bedtime. What to do?

Suddenly, in your random channel search, you halt at channel 4 (local cable). In a wig and a gown strikingly similar to that of Morticia Adams is Crematia Mortum. If you don't immediately succumb to the hairpiece and the provocative evening wear, listen to her siren's voice for a few moments. Crematia is weird; she is zany and has a bizarre humor. But the timbre of her voice...she could be Luciano Pavarotti's understudy!

Most of the movies are lousy or so-so with a few 'I can't look, tell me what happens.' The worse the film, the better Crematia's chatter.

Don't let Roberta's comments about Crematia fool you. Being a late night TV idol is not an easy or irresponsible position to hold. She's playing to a tough audience: cab drivers, insomniacs, new mothers, the swing shift, 'things that go bump in the night,' and those of us dedicated to the night. What can I say? The woman's got star quality.

Editor's Note: Since we typeset this interview, Wild Wooley's has closed its doors forever. Crematia is still on the air, same channel -- different time and day. Crematia's Saturday Nightmare airs at 10:30 PM on Saturday nights.

Kathleen's next interview for 2AM will be with Commander USA. Watch for it!



Masks

by Jeff Johnston

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The mask fit perfectly. Snug from the front of my nose back through my cheekbones and on down to the bottom of my neck.

I looked at myself in the mirror, admiring my now perpetual smile. I felt my facial muscles mold into proper shape until my face and mask were one, wearing the same sanguine expression.

I was pleased. In fact, by the time I left my home my entire body seemed to blend in with the good feeling the mask projected outward. I could feel the bounce in my step, the feeling of savoir-faire to my demeanor that made others who passed me return my smile. As I passed a shop window I looked at my reflection and saw a face that was without a care in the world, one that was happy to be alive.

Excellent, I thought as I or the mask, whatever, smiled again. The mask covered everything just like it was supposed to. Keeping people from seeing what truly lay behind.

* * *

The week went well. So did the weekend, which I partied away with fervor.

It was the beginning of the next week that I noticed the small tear in the mask. It formed a thin line where the top of my neck met the jawbone. Nothing major, I supposed. Hardly noticeable.

I put it on and looked at myself in the mirror. Well, it certainly didn't look that bad. In fact you had to look pretty hard to even see it.

So I wore it and went through the day, the mask and my face smiling as before, despite a fine line of sweat I could feel forming at my neck.

Still, no one noticed.

* * *

The slight tear was becoming a major rip. In the privacy of my own home I examined the damage. My hands felt clammy, and my heart pounded as I inspected it. Dammit, what was I supposed to do now? After fussing over it, I finally put it on and looked at myself in the mirror. The rent in the mask now exposed most of my left cheekbone and tore at the corner of the mouth, turning the smile into a sneer.

Terrified, I pulled it off and attempted to fix it with a parti-

cularly strong type of clear tape. After repairs, I checked the mirror again and told myself it would have to do as I left the house, a slight twitch to my manner now apparent, I'm afraid, and throughout the day people watched me curiously.

* * *

Oh, God, I thought. I choked off a scream. I almost broke the mirror. The mask was now pockmarked, like someone with a poor complexion. I did some more repair which seemed to have very little effect at all.

I left to start the day. People stared at me like I was an animal to be gawked at in the zoo. Tears, previously hidden, seeped through the exposed places of the mask. People asked me in hushed tones if I was feeling all right and it was all I could do to keep from screaming my hatred.

The day finally ended and I headed for home. There, where no one could see me, I worked feverishly on sewing and taping the mask. I laughed as I worked, cried, screamed, spoke in gibberish, until finally I had done all that I could.

My body trembled uncontrollably, and it required a pill, taken in double dosage, to allow my tortured body to sleep that night.

* * *

The next day the mask was all but nothing. Almost nonexistent. Parts of myself lay raw and exposed for people to witness at their leisure. No longer would I be able to keep an even temper. Within a few hours of my arrival, I received permission to leave early. I called in sick for the next three days, explaining it away as a persistent virus, while fighting to keep the madness from transmitting itself through the phone's receiver. At home, by myself, I alternated between lying helpless as a baby, curled on my bed, and screaming obscenities at the walls. I took a pill every six hours to sleep, to soothe away the madness. And I waited.

* * *

By the time I heard the familiar sound outside my door, I was so deep into my madness that I could not even be sure what I heard was real. I crept quietly to the door, pressed my ear against it and listened as it approached.

My God! That sound again! I leaped back, going backward until I hit the opposite wall. I watched the door, listened to what moved on the other side of it. A dull thump I heard, followed by the sound of something wet and milky slithering along the floor. The thump again, followed by the same dragging sound. A thump again, this one loud enough to shake the floorboards, and then the wet, slimy sound.

Then there was silence and I knew it had to be on the other side, just there with only the flimsy wood of the door to divide us. It waited for me now. I screamed for it to go away, then pleaded for it to remain. I thought I heard its harsh, raspy breathing or was that my imagination borne of fear?

I laughed, then cried, then screamed, then repeated the process as my hand clutched the doorknob, pulled to open the door in sheer

terror. And felt my insides turn to liquid as I saw the faces, masks, thousands of faces rotating and turning in a grotesque figure eight.

I reached out my hand, my voice begging no more, oh God, please, no more. But my body contradicted me as my hand reached, my eyes trying to turn away from the huge, slimy mass that moved with the faces, like a slug, offering its gifts to me and sending cold, icy needles straight into my heart.

* * *

The new mask fit perfectly. I'd had it for weeks, I thought, and still it stayed snug from the front of my nose back through my cheekbones to the bottom of my neck.

I looked in the mirror and tried to admire myself. Wonderful, I thought, but a feeling of coldness swept through me made me pause. For a second something tugged at my memory, something . . . I shook it off. Admired myself again. Something about the face bothered me. Had I worn it before or was it changed somehow?

Impossible. But the coldness slid through me again. I shuddered.

Finally I rose, feeling uneasy. I checked the mirror one more time for reassurance. Felt satisfied. Straightened up and walked out my door to the outside....feeling warm and secure.

Except for the thin line of sweat forming at my neck.

HEAVY BREATHING

Copyright © 1987 by Marthayn Pelegrimas

The wind is talking,
chattering my window.
He whispers threats,
howling at leafy corpses.

The wind is breathing
through small cracks in my door.
He exhales
dirty puffs of worn-out air.

The wind is anxious,
scraping at my house boards.
He's brought a storm
and spits raindrops on the roof.

The wind is waiting
for me to come outside.
Blowing kisses,
knocking,
scratching,
clawing,
waiting to steal my breath.

--Marthayn Pelegrimas



*Getting to the top in rock music is tough...
Staying there is even tougher...*

Autograph

by Robert Stricklin

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After a four-hour concert including three encores that exhausted his entire repertoire, Dave Desmond had no other plans for the evening except a hot shower, a cold beer and a warm bed. He finally left the stage at midnight with a hearty 'Good night, New York!' He then strode off into the darkness with the cheers of two thousand fans ringing in his ears, his guitar slung over his shoulder, his body bathed in sweat and his fingertips stinging from a hard night's work.

He followed the rest of the band through a maze of backstage obstacles (some of them human), but paused abruptly when he noticed a young woman standing in the shadow of a metal stairwell. She was staring at him in a manner so intriguing that he couldn't help but stop dead in his tracks. She wasn't part of the entourage. Nor was she one of the production crew. She wore no press card, no distinguishing identification. She certainly wasn't a groupie for there wasn't a glint of worship in her eyes. Desmond had no idea who she was or how she had eluded security. But she was beautiful. Blonde, blue-eyed, pale as porcelain but just as exquisite, garbed in a white silk dress that flowed clear down to her dainty ankles. An angel, he thought fleetingly.

She approached him, clutching a black leatherbound autograph album in both hands, as if to present it as a gift. Her intentions were obvious and ordinarily Desmond would decline such a request, but she was different and not to be denied. Beautiful, yes. An angel, perhaps.

'Pardon me, Mr. Desmond,' she said, her mellifluous voice soothing to his throbbing ears. 'May I have your autograph?'

There was something strangely enticing about her request. At that particular moment, he probably would have given her anything -- his house, his car, the guitar off his back. It was a sort of love at first sight, yet unlike any kind of infatuation he had ever known. In his profession one learned early not to give one's heart to the first extraordinary stranger who crossed one's path. But he would have gladly given that, too, if she had asked for it. His signature was such a small thing to ask for.

'Sure,' he smiled, accepting the book. 'Why not?'

He thumbed through several pages without noticing the dedications they contained and found a suitable space for his entry. She provided him with an elegant black fountain pen which he momentarily scrutinized, doubtful something so handsome could possibly work.

'And to whom should I dedicate this?' he asked, more out of curiosity than necessity.

'My name is Lucinda,' she declared.

'Lucinda?' he repeated, surprised, impressed and intrigued. As he filled the page with a gracious salutation ('To Lucinda, the loveliest lady this side of midnight, from your humble admirer, Dave Desmond'), he attempted to engage her in some backstage repartee. 'Did you enjoy the concert?' he inquired.

'It was wonderful,' Lucinda replied with what resembled warmth and sincerity.

'Just wonderful?' he teased.

Her smile blossomed into a sweet grin that lifted his spirits higher than they had been in such a long time. His recent success as a recording artist had been gratifying at first, but never entirely fulfilling. The struggle to land a contract and place an album in the Top Ten had been more fun than being a celebrity. The day 'Fields of Fire' shipped gold was the day he could no longer relate to anyone in quite the same way and in achieving that milestone, he had sacrificed his privileges as an ordinary man.

But here was an angel smiling at him, assuring him, 'You were never better.'

'That's what we like to hear,' he sighed. Then, at the risk of sounding immodest, he admitted, 'It was an exceptional set. But then I've been blessed with one of the finest bands in the business. Those guys could make anybody sound good.'

'You know that isn't true,' said Lucinda in a startlingly confident voice. It was as if Desmond was listening to his own naked conscience. There was no lying to this woman, no point in engaging in false humility. He knew greatness when he heard it and he had heard it that night coming from his own hands.

'You're the heart of the band,' she maintained. 'It bears your name. You write the songs. Where would they be without you?'

'Probably out making an honest living,' Desmond remarked with a chuckle.

As he was handing her the book, it slipped from his grip and dropped to the floor. 'Oops,' he said, impulsively bending down to retrieve it. As he did, Desmond caught a glimpse of one of its other pages and gasped with astonishment.

'Is this really *Elvis* autograph?' he asked, rising slowly, wide-eyed with awe.

'Yes,' Lucinda nonchalantly confirmed.

'Wow. How'd you get it?'

'I met him in the lobby of a hotel in Las Vegas.'

'Damn,' Desmond muttered. 'That's a collector's item.' Impressed, he reviewed other pages of the album. What he discovered was just as astounding. 'I don't believe it...Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, back-to-back...Jim Morrison...Keith Moon...John Bonham...Is this authentic?'

Lucinda laughed. 'Of course, it is.'

'This belongs in the Smithsonian,' he raved. 'I'd guard it with my life if I were you. Insure it for a cool million. You could auction it off for twice as much.'

'It's not for sale,' Lucinda hastened to inform him.

'God!' Desmond exclaimed, enthralled by the little black book with the names of his musical heroes inscribed in its priceless pages.

'This is the Hall of Fame of rock and roll. Look, ah...are you busy now? Would you like to have a cup of coffee with me? I'd really love to...to talk to you about this.'

'Well, it /s late,' she said, taking the book from his hands.

'I know, but...I just have to shower and change my clothes. I have a limo waiting for me outside. We could go to a quiet place where I wouldn't be recognized. We could talk. What do you say?'

The idea seemed to appeal to her, yet Lucinda did not readily accept. She teased him with her silence, mystified him with her haunting blue eyes. 'All right,' she finally agreed.

'Great!' said Desmond, backing off. 'I'll make it as fast as I can. Don't go away.'

And as he rushed off, he heard her murmur over his shoulder, 'I'll be waiting for you.'

The limousine was waiting for them in a garage beneath the theatre, enabling Desmond and Lucinda to avoid the mob scene outside the stage door. They were driven to a diner on Tenth Avenue where, as Desmond had predicted, he wasn't recognized by the nighthawks who lined the counter, engrossed in their midnight snacks. He and his beautiful companion retired to a booth in the rear, ordered coffee and discussed the one subject that fascinated Desmond.

'I can't get over this book,' he told Lucinda, reaching across the table to lift the autograph album from her hands and savor its contents from cover to cover. 'Jim Croce, Marc Bolan, Bobby Fuller, Marvin Gaye ... *Buddy Holly!*' Desmond gawked at her quizzically. 'How old are you anyway?'

The question seemed to amuse Lucinda, yet she did not reply.

'It's just that...some of these artists go back twenty-five, thirty years,' Desmond elaborated. 'And you don't look a day over... Did you inherit this book from your mother or something?'

'I've been around,' Lucinda vaguely explained.

'I'll say. This is incredible,' said Desmond, flipping pages. Suddenly, he froze, staring into the album as if mesmerized. Eventually, he raised his astonished eyes and gazed at Lucinda's radiant face. 'When did you get Lennon's autograph?' he asked.

'In the summer of '80,' she casually replied, folding her hands on the table. 'As he was leaving the Dakota.'

A chill crept up Desmond's spine. 'God,' he shuddered. 'I'm ashamed to have my name in company like this.'

'Ashamed?'

'I mean...I don't deserve to be included. These people were legends. Me...well, like the song says, 'I'm just a singer in a rock and roll band.'''

'Oh, no, David. You're much more than that,' Lucinda readily assured him. 'It's true, they *were* legends, but you are a legend in the making.'

'Please...' he scoffed. 'I'm flattered, but...'

'They possessed that indefinable quality,' said Lucinda. 'Some call it "charisma." An aura that set them apart from their contemporaries. But you, David, you are not unlike them. You have your own distinctive sound and a persona that could not be confused with anyone else's. Your music weaves a rich tapestry of thought and emotion and wonder. There's magic in your fingers, spirit in your voice, genius

in your soul...'

Desmond was speechless. He was held in her spell as utterly as a fly in a spider's web. She spoke with such conviction, so convincingly that he almost believed her. 'Only a certain type of person can have his autograph in that book,' she told him. 'He must be chosen.'

Chosen. The word confused Desmond. Why *chosen*? Did she mean it was the ultimate compliment? Was it a privilege to be asked to sign the album? Apparently it was. 'But what do I have in common with Elvis or John Lennon or Buddy Holly, except rock and roll?' he wondered aloud.

Lucinda did not reply. There was no need to reply. Desmond gazed into her strange, haunting eyes and slowly the answer became clear. He heard music in a jukebox of the mind, a medley of songs that had formed the foundation of his musical apprenticeship. There was the eloquently sinister sound of Jim Morrison crooning 'Moonlight Drive' and the memory of Otis Redding whistling 'Dock Of The Bay.' There was the bittersweet serenade of Elvis Presley's 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' 'That'll Be The Day' vowed Buddy Holly as the vision of a plane nose-diving through the clouds crossed Desmond's delirious mind. He could see Jimi Hendrix's fingers prancing across the frets of a fiery guitar, the smoke rising into a purple haze. He heard John Lennon quoting from the Tibetan Book Of The Dead in the psychedelic maelstrom of 'Tomorrow Never Knows' with a thousand and one musical instruments surging toward the ultimate crescendo, hurtling higher and higher and higher to the brink of madness, reaching that final note on the grand piano sustained in a fade-out that seemed to last forever. It was the sound of doom. The sound of oblivion. The sound of immortality.

And at that moment, Desmond realized why Lucinda had added his autograph to her distinguished collection and what all those artists had in common besides rock and roll. It was in her eyes. It was in the smile that masked her mocking skull. It was obvious.

They were all dead.

Desmond took one last look at the album and turned to the page where he had included his inscription: 'To Lucinda, the loveliest lady this side of midnight, from your humble admirer, Dave Desmond.' It read like an epitaph.

Then he closed the book and studied her face. There was no doubt about it. Beautiful, yes. An angel, perhaps.



*It's a long, hard climb to the top of any profession. It's not only lonely at the top, it's also a long way down...
ZAM is proud to present the story that inspired this issue's cover...*

A Little Elevator Music

by Dennis Holmberg

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'A' nother day, another million.' Chuckling beneath his thoughts, Eustis Pomeroy looked over a print-out of the day's financial transactions.

Well, not quite a million, but close. Enough, at least, to keep the wolves from the door a few more years.' He laughed greedily, unable to resist his wit regarding the vast fortune he controlled.

As president and chairman-of-the-board of Megatech Industries, Eustis Pomeroy was well-fed, and equally well-hated. 'So a few of the slow get left behind; the race belongs to the swift,' he would bellow at detractors.

It was just past midnight as Eustis walked from his office, pausing briefly to glare at his reflection in the large mirror next to the elevator. He saw himself as taller than his true measure of five foot; he redistributed the excess around his middle, heightening his self-image. With a satisfied snort he turned away and noticed the sign: ELEVATOR OUT OF ORDER--PLEASE USE SERVICE CAR AT REAR OF BUILDING.

Trailing a string of invective, Eustis puffed down the hall, uncertain of the service elevator's location. Suddenly, from behind, a steady voice rose above his muttering.

'I'm sorry, but you're going the wrong way.'

Eustis froze. There wasn't supposed to be anyone around at this time of night, not even security; they watched everything on monitors from the lobby. He glanced up and around, hoping to spot a camera.

'Who the hell are you?' Eustis demanded. The shriveled old man in the ill-fitting uniform smiled.

'I'm Lazlo, Mr. Pomeroy. The elevator operator. Don't you remember?'

'Remember? I can't remember the last time we had elevator operators around here. Say, what is this?'

'Don't be upset, Mr. Pomeroy. I'm just here to help you find your way....Why don't you come with me?'

Eustis followed the man through a confusing network of halls. He was tired, and if indulging this crack-pot would see him in his bed any sooner, so be it.

The service car was a large metal cage which had seen better days. Eustis felt a familiar twinge of discomfort growing in his gut.

'Are you sure this thing is safe?'

'Sure, Mr. Pomeroy. I rode her up myself just awhile ago. She's old and fussy, like us,' he said winking, 'but she'll do the job.'

Hearing the dull roar of air in the shaft, Eustis thought of the fifty stories of vertical darkness below. Terrifying! He feared elevators and used the stairs whenever possible.

'Well...let's get going. I haven't got all night.'

The old man ushered him in, shutting the wide door with a clang. Overhead, a naked bulb cast harsh shadows in long, angular patterns. In a single quick motion, Lazlo released the brake and put the heavy car in gear.

Groaning deeply, the elevator began its descent.

Imagining ancient rust-corroded cables grinding threateningly against their load, Eustis shut his eyes and tried thinking of the beach at Saint Thomas; of bikini-clad girls rubbing oil on his fat thighs. But the fantasy escaped him; he was distracted by the music.

Music?

Popping open his eyes, he looked around.

'Just a little elevator music, Mr. Pomeroy. Kind of lifts the spirits, don't you think?'

It was Dixieland, coming from far below them but very clear; the shaft was an excellent sound conductor. Then, Pomeroy placed the melody: When The Saints Come Marching In.

'I think this whole business is crazy, that's what I think! A nutty old man lurking in hallways, masquerading as an elevator operator! Who in blazes are you, anyway?'

No longer smiling, his face a leer, Lazlo spoke. 'Why, Mr. Pomeroy, I'm disappointed you don't recognize me. Lazlo Kofacs. I used to work here. I took you up and down for nearly twenty years. I saw it all: your rise to power, the lust for success, and the growing lack of humanity.'

Eustis began to sweat.

'Then, just before my retirement and my pension came due...you gave me the boot.' He shook his head sadly.

'I was too old to find another job and soon the savings were gone. And my wife...well, she died, you see.'

'Thank God, I wasn't long to follow.'

Eustis felt the blood drain from his face as a glint of recognition entered the corners of his bulging eyes.

'Kofacs, impossible! That was twenty-five years ago. You were old and feeble then. You'd...he'd...be dead by now.'

'As I said, Mr. Pomeroy.'

The elevator lurched and Eustis gulped air rapidly. He was feeling unbalanced; a potent combination of dread and nausea working its way through his system. Looking up, he watched the tightly wound cables vanish into the blackness. Were they even half-way down yet?

He couldn't take much more.

Perhaps it was a trick of the poor lighting, but when he lowered his eyes, Eustis saw a Lazlo transformed.

Yellow eyes stared out from sunken sockets, ashen skin stretched painfully over a skeletal face. When he spoke, it was with a new voice: deeper, and more compelling.

'Impossible or not, Mr. Pomeroy, here we are. You might say I've been brought back temporarily...for one last trip.'

Eustis closed his eyes again. This wasn't real. He'd been working too hard lately and the stress had gotten him. He must be hallucinating.

But when he opened his eyes, the Lazlo-thing was still there.

He wished he could attack the apparition, cast it aside, stop the damned elevator and run from this nightmare; but he was paralyzed with fear.

'Listen, Kofacs, I don't know who you are or what this is all about...but you've got to let me out of here. I'll pay you...anything...I'm a wealthy man...'

'You will pay, Mr. Pomeroy, have no doubt about that.' The Lazlo-thing was smirking fiendishly. Eustis tried with all his might to recall the Lord's prayer.

Beneath them the strains of brassy music grew louder, playing counterpoint to the wild beating of his heart.

'I'm taking you down, Mr. Pomeroy, farther down than you've ever been: to a reunion of sorts.' Lazlo laughed, and Eustis heard the soft rattling of bones beneath the baggy uniform.

'Jesus, man, what are you talking about?'

'There are a lot more like me, Mr. Pomeroy. Think of your past: the people you've used, the lives you so ruthlessly destroyed. Think of them...if you dare.'

'Stop it...please!' he shrieked. But a cellar door in his mind had opened and he was remembering.

Jules, his business partner, leaped from the back of a forgotten memory and out the window, screaming 'Murderer!' as he fell to the street below. Moments before, Eustis had phoned the authorities, a neat case of fabricated embezzlement in a folder on the desk.

There were others, too. Many others. Ex-wives, business rivals, and the countless people who had trusted their lives and fortunes to his care. He had only wanted to get ahead, to have the edge, to survive!

But it was getting late for excuses...

He heard the voices now: booming voices singing with the music... 'oh when the saints come mar-chin' in...oh when the saints come mar-chin' in...'

He tried to shut it out, but the words and the music and the Lazlo-thing had him by the balls.

Music swelling.

Voices jubilant.

The elevator came to a sudden, jarring halt.

The door opened and Eustis saw them: the victims of his life teeming with an aura of vengeful hatred. The car vibrated from the chorus of inhuman voices as vaporous figures swirled through and out, back and forth.

It was Mardi-Gras in hell: the revelers possessed and frenzied.

They sang their song and danced their dance as Eustis Pomeroy, screaming and waving his arms helplessly, crumbled to the floor.

When the dark forms and bright music engulfed him, he was aware of a singular voice, familiar and haunting: it was his voice -- a surprisingly strong baritone -- joining in the singing...

...'I want to be a-mong that num-ber, oh when the saints come mar-chin' in...'

Then there was silence.

In the morning it took the fire department an hour to remove the mangled body from the wreckage. The lieutenant in charge was scowling as he spoke to a rookie cop.

'What I don't understand is why the son-of-a-bitch got in that old rig in the first place. Service elevator's been shut down for years. Too dangerous. Damn warning signs up there are plain enough; I checked myself.'

The cop nodded grimly.

A small group of curious onlookers had gathered, and the rescue workers had to push their way through with the lopsided body-bag. The lieutenant looked away from the rookie and down at the bloody elevator shaft.

'Tell ya one thing...it was fast. That ole cable up there would've snapped soon as the brake was released...probably hit bottom in under twenty seconds. Hell of a twenty seconds, though.'

The cop shuddered. 'Must have seemed like a lifetime...'

Somewhere in the deep distance a few fragments of a discordant music seeped up from the womb of the building.

No one heard, and it settled into an eerie, final hush.

THE MAD POET'S MAGIC FAILS

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Behind that dark and dusty wall,
Tumbled, crumbled, bathed in vine,
I hear the voice within you call:

'Roses wilt and sparrows fall,
And infants bloat as princes dine
Behind that dark and dusty wall;

Leathered women wear the shawl
Of black silk over twisted spine--'
I hear the voice within you call.

Between the dawn and eveningfall
You watch the sun refuse to shine
Behind that dark and dusty wall.

No longer walking now, you crawl
On bleeding knees to find a shrine.
I hear the voice within you call.

In carmine ink on slate you scrawl,
Using precious venous wine:
'Behind that dark and dusty wall
I hear the voice within you call.'



*Bob Warner lets the cat out of the bag with this revealing little tail
--Whoops!--We meant to say 'tale'...*

Marta's Cat

by Bob Warner

Copyright © 1987 Bob Warner

The cat jumped against my leg and growled ominously. 'Good cat,' I said, then stooped to pet it. It jumped back and hissed at me, its eyes glaring malevolently. It was Marta's cat, and for that reason alone I had tried several times to make friends with it. I ended up detesting it. It was a nasty parasite; all it seemed to do was eat and sleep and purr and make a nuisance of itself. Oh, yes, it also growled and hissed at everyone except Marta. It was insufferably jealous and could be, I had no doubts, quite vicious.

It was a typical cat: aloof and demanding. I could have perhaps tolerated a dog. Dogs, on the whole, are somewhat more friendly creatures. But the cat was too egotistical, too icy cold and aggressive. It made me profoundly nervous.

'Be down in a minute, Freddy,' Marta called from upstairs. I wondered what she did up there. She always made me wait downstairs with the cat while she -- while she took her own sweet time doing whatever it was she did up there.

I walked over to the sofa and sat down. The cat, persistent as always, stalked after me. It sniffed at the toe of my shoe, then unsheathed its claws and put a row of scratch marks across the top of my shoe. I wanted so much to kick the damn thing across the room. Yes, that would have been a fine thing to do; that would have given me tremendous satisfaction.

'Have yourself a drink, why don't you?' Marta called. Her voice was high and lilting, but somehow distant. Marta was sometimes like her cat: aloof and distant. She almost always had to have things on her terms.

I got up, poured myself a whiskey and sipped it. The cat stalked about my ankles. I gave it a gentle nudge with my shoe, the one it had scratched. It wouldn't go away.

'I'm coming down now.'

Relieved, I drained the glass and stepped away from the cat. The little beast quickly followed, nipping at my heels like a dog. It sank its claws -- all of them -- into my left leg, just above my ankle. I had to clench my teeth to keep from crying aloud in pain.

'Ta ta,' said Marta as she appeared at the top of the stairs. She made a little curtsy then began a graceful descent, as though put-

ting on an elaborate show for me. The cat began biting -- gnawing on the tendon of my heel. The pain was excruciating.

'Like my new dress?'

'Oh, yes!' I blurted, trying to control my voice. I kicked backward, hoping to dislodge the cat, and almost lost my balance.

'It's such a special occasion,' said Marta. 'We've been going together a whole month today.' She was almost to the bottom of the stairs, moving in that sinewy, sensual way of hers. She was so lovely, so graceful, so beautiful. But there was something almost -- glacial -- in her expression, something unnervingly feline in the way she moved her body.

'Very special,' I said, trying to shake the cat loose. 'Oh, yes, a very special occasion, indeed.'

The cat was beginning to growl. Its razor teeth were tearing away at my Achilles tendon, attacking it with a ravenous violence. I could feel blood flowing down into my shoe.

'Where's Mitzi?' asked Marta, looking about. 'She was here just a few minutes ago. Naughty Kitty, come out and let me pet you before I go. She's such an adorable little creature, isn't she, Freddy?'

Marta had reached the bottom of the stairs where she stopped to look all round for the cat. She wore such a heavenly perfume. Her dress was cut in a low 'V' and part of her full breasts shone satiny.

'I'm afraid Mitzi has hold of my leg,' I said, trying to chuckle, trying to make a joke of it so I wouldn't upset her. Marta had such a frightful temper when she became upset.

'Oh, oh, oh,' gasped Marta. She ran forward, knelt and gathered the furry little beast to her bosom.

'Poor dear. Poor darling.' Marta held the cat snugly against her breasts. 'Really, Freddy,' she said, looking at me with flashing anger in her eyes. 'What have you been doing to Mitzi!'

'I didn't do a damn thing,' I said. 'Your cat attacked me. And for no reason at all. Look here where it's been chewing on my leg!'

'Not likely!' snapped Marta. 'You must have done something awful to provoke Mitzi. Poor defenseless kitten. You've never liked her. Just look how she's trembling!' The furry thing was trying to climb higher, working its claws in her dress and purring noisily. It buried its ugly face in the cleavage of Marta's breasts.

'Please leave right now!' Marta said in a firm, cold tone of voice. She stroked that nuzzling monstrosity and stared icily at me, as though I no longer existed.

'Yes,' I said, feeling foolish. Feeling defeated. 'Yes, I guess I'd better go.'

I paused at the door and looked back over my shoulder. Marta had turned and I saw her and the cat in profile. I felt an icy numbness down my spine as Marta pulled aside her dress, exposing one full, soft breast. The cat moved its head greedily, took the nipple of Marta's breast in its mouth and began noisily feeding.

Marta smiled contentedly. Then, suddenly aware that I was still there, she turned her face to me and shouted:

'Get the hell out of here, you beast!'

And that's what I did.

I've never been back.

THE DEVOURER
or
The Last Poem

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Across the fused-glass deserts of the Middle East
Where Armageddon slaked its fiery thirst
Rode one who ranked, in wrath, among the first --
In fear and mercy stood he low among the least.

Those were not days when men would succor foe or friend
Or send the wounded home in covered vans.
The victors in the fights for countless lands
Consumed the starving vanquished at the battle's end.

Out of the cannibal melee there shambled soon
A cunning leader, stout in strength and girth,
With dark charisma that could sweep the Earth --
His grinning face ascending like a cratered moon.

Fierce Rondal, the Devourer, so called by his troops --
His hunger was not solely for viands.
How greedily he gorged on Asia's lands,
Then set on Europe, swiftly as the vulture swoops!

Another era might have seen him scorned or chained.
A healthier world would seal him in a cell.
But in a time when earth steamed red as hell
The power of Rondal waxed supreme, and sanity waned.

Exhausted nations lay supine for tyrant's tread.
His ranks swelled with the callous and depraved
From whose rapacious wrath naught could be saved.
Beneath his rule, living men learned to envy dead.

To serve him, we exalted cruelty as a faith;
Each vied with all in viciousness and waste --
And knew pangs of remorse and vile distaste --
But hint of this, and feel the steel tipped scourge's scathe!

Though power corrupts the straitened wills of common men
No power made mad Rondal more corrupt.
When king he dined, as ever he had supped
On humble cuts and tidbits from the prison-pen.

'A good commander shares the food his troops are fed.
Don't bring me fruits and pastries,' was his word.
'Instead, set torch to every farm and herd!
We don't rely on peasants' labor for our bread!'

In time whole legions rose in mutiny, bravely led
By souls less dissolute in murderous lust
Who felt the need to plow and plant the dust
Of ravaged nations, so that new ones could be bred.

Then Rondal's Locusts paused in pillage everywhere --
For had their pickings not grown slim of late?
They turned -- and marched, and burned, and slew and ate
Their former comrades, savoring the fatter fare!

Great Rondal's eminence scoured the globe, and never ceased.
The numbers of his armies did not grow,
For treachery and strife gnawed from below --
But every savage fight led to a sumptuous feast!

And now I write, within the world's last city walls
While all around are camped his hungry host --
A vast, though dwindling, army of the most
Voracious veterans of ten thousand trumpet calls.

And though a famous fighter, certainly no coward,
I soon shall cast myself upon my spear.
I cannot bear the prospect that draws near
Of facing him, when all the others are devoured.

--Leonard Carpenter



Everyone who possesses a unique talent must choose between using that talent for good or evil...

Standard Procedure

by Colleen Drippe'

Copyright © 1987 Colleen Drippe'

The clay soil crumbled, gritting out across the limestone shelf to abrade his skin, pressing in a cratered pattern on his forearms. Craig lay prone, in jeans and torn adidas shirt, chin balanced on the backs of his hands as he watched the road below.

The ubiquitous cricket song made of the night a solid thing, thick and hot and moist, drowning all but the loudest of the vehicles on I-65.

Craig shifted once, drawing up one knee to ease the tension in his back. The sound of rasping denim was loud and sudden, causing the man behind him to suck in his breath in a sudden hoarse 'Uh!'

Someone lit a cigarette and Mason whispered, 'Got one, kid?'

'Not yet,' Craig told him. 'Soon, okay?'

'Sure. Wanna smoke?'

Craig did not, but he took the offered Camel. The warm smoke slid thickly into his lungs, making him slightly dizzy. A faint throbbing began at his temples.

Blue. It was a van -- no, a bus. No, it was a camper...

Unheeded, the cigarette burned away between suddenly flaccid fingers.

Driver: male and tired. Middle-aged, maybe, and a woman the same. She was nearly asleep. Girl--daughter?--sacked out in the back.

'Okay,' Craig whispered. 'Coming up. About two miles...'

'Go for it.' Prescott's voice was gleeful--a kid on a fishing trip. Or a hunter in sight of prey...

Craig played out the hook that was his will. You're tired, he said. You've got to pull over--got to rest. Here--see how wide the verge? How snug beneath the bluffs? Listen to the water drip from tiny springs, running down the rock...

So tired -- got to pull over. Yes, here...

A semi rumbled by, only its forward cones of light visible from above, the dark bulk of it no more than a trailing shadow.

Come on -- here in the peaceful dark -- here below the layered rock. Limestone -- ah, can you hear it? The memory of the sea...

Lights flared, dimmed and slowed. Gravel scrunched directly below, but only Craig heard it. The motor died and then the lights.

('What is it?' she was asking and he said that he was tired.

'I'll drive,' she said and Craig told her she was tired, too.)

Silence.

'Now,' he said at last, rising stiffly to brush the earth from his knees, his stomach.

Near where he had lain, the soil rose up into the mealy mound of a fire-ant pile. Craig had not been bitten -- ants were easier than people.

'Let's go down,' Mason said. In the dark, Craig felt him grinning and he bared his own teeth in reply.

'They've got a girl,' he said.

'Cash?'

'That, too.'

'What about McKenzie?' John McKenzie was the highway patrolman whose mind Craig must nudge from time to time.

'He's having coffee,' Craig told them. 'Got a new guy with him. Taking longer than usual to bullshit the waitress...'

They began the descent, feeling their way into a narrow channel-- almost a crack--that Prescott had found. Gravel turned beneath their feet, ghosting down, and once Craig picked up the dim and alien consciousness of a cottonmouth. He warned the thing away...

Below, the camper waited. It was one of the fancy ones with beds and table and toilet. A lap dog whined nervously in its sleep, though only Craig could hear it. He led the animal down deeper, to the place below its doggy dreams...

'The doors are locked,' he said aloud.

'Yeah?'

'Let's get closer,' Prescott suggested, 'and keep the thing between us and the freeway.'

In the dark, Craig nodded. 'I'll bring them out,' he said.

Even now in the midnight hush, an occasional car sped by. The trucks were faster, surer. This was their road now, their hour...

None of them slowed.

He concentrated on the man. Water, streams and trickles and mounting discomfort. Get up, man. Get up and piss...

The bathroom.

It stinks in there. Gotta get it pumped out. How about stepping outside? The night is soft and warm and private. Come out and piss to the tune of the cricket song.

The woman stirred on the bed. She was fully clothed save for her shoes and she was hot. Even with the screened windows open, it was stifling in there. Crickets screamed, semis roared and the night reeked of diesel and pine and the cloying sweetness of distant honeysuckle.

She wasn't too old, Craig decided, as he soothed her. She was a bonus...

The man got up and they heard plainly the snick of the latch. The door squeaked a little as it came open and gravel crunched hesitantly.

That's right. Nice out, isn't it? Just you and the dark and the rocks way up there -- trees and brush against the blurry stars... ...and us.

He never knew what hit him. Mason swung the shotgun and he fell. Prescott was there with a knife. Blood bubbled in a dark pool from the smile beneath his chin -- but only Craig saw it.

They entered the camper.

Later, when the women were finally dead and Prescott and Mason were discussing whether they could set the thing on fire, one of the semi's slowed.

Go on, Craig told the driver. You didn't see anything. You're getting sleepy. Maybe find a diner down the road...

No one else noticed the pulled over camper.

Prescott was shaking as he passed a joint to Mason. In the dark the cherry glow showed his eyes wild and black and crazy.

Mason glanced over at Craig who was not smoking.

'You snagged 'em alright, spaceman.'

'Don't call me that,' Craig said and his voice was flat.

(Don't call me THAT!)

Mason shifted nervously, fishing in his pocket for a roach clip.

'Yeah,' he said. And then, 'How you gonna handle this one?'

'Oil truck,' Craig told him. 'Big crash. Nothing left.'

'Like before?'

'Sure. Why not?'

'They'll know something's weird,' Mason said. 'Too many times...'

Craig shrugged thin shoulders, shook his hair from his eyes. 'I can make them forget...'

'Yeah,' Mason said again and Craig glanced over at the rough silhouette. Mason was thick-necked and bearded, smelling of sweat and pine and sex, reeking as well of marijuana smoke. Craig knew for the first time for sure that Mason truly hated him. Hated and despised, abhorred and feared...

Craig Smith was a freak. Space man. Mason would try to kill him someday.

Suddenly Prescott giggled, his flat blonde face visible only to Craig as he wiped his nose on the back of one freckled wrist.

'She was a live one,' he said. 'That girl. But she ain't now...'

He giggled again. Prescott had strangled her -- and the dog.

'Let's get out of here,' Mason said. 'Where's McKenzie now?'

'Other side,' Craig told him. The deaths were a lurid smear at the back of his mind -- not that he regretted them. He hated those who lived ordered lives -- who prospered and judged and despised...

But he felt dirtied now, like he had been had. Like a dumb whore who does it for nothing. He thought he might leave Mason and Prescott behind this time -- when he called that oil truck to its final rendezvous.

Prescott would be easy enough. He was already stoned out of what little mind he had. But Mason...

Craig felt the other's attention on him. Oh, Mason hated him, alright. But he didn't suspect yet that Craig could -- would want to -- kill him. No, he just hated the way you might hate some creep you didn't quite trust.

For the first time, Craig saw clearly how it was. He wasn't their pal, their compadre, their equal -- he was a nasty thing they took up and used and put aside later, half-embarrassed and wanting to wash up and forget. Until next time...

You're too stoned, he told Mason underneath. Laid back. There is no hurry.

Mason watched him, dull-eyed as though even his brains were bloodshot. But underneath, Mason wasn't tired. He was too keyed up...

Craig reached out, checking the road. Young couple in Honda, drunken teenagers in pickup, fertilizer truck, refrigerated truck, log

truck. Somewhere, miles to the north, McKenzie was pulling onto the exit ramp. The new state cop was a funny guy -- almost opaque. His name was Sam and his head ached. Sam said something Craig couldn't pick up and dry-swallowed an Excedrin. Poor Sam.

No oil truck yet, but Craig thought he felt one coming in the northbound lane. Up from Montgomery, probably. He would have to get the guy to pull off up ahead and turn around -- the camper was in the south lane.

Craig waited, and Prescott giggled. Mason watched Craig, fingers drumming on the dash while, in the back, darkness hid the dead. 'Got a truck,' Craig said. 'Be another hour...' He was lying -- it would be fifteen minutes at the most. Space out, Mason. You're getting sleepy...

Mason continued to watch him.

McKenzie and the new guy started back south while, somewhere up on the bluff, an owl swooped down over a running rabbit. Sam was talking to McKenzie but Craig couldn't make out a word he said. He heard clearly, the shrill scream of the rabbit...

And then one image flashed across from Sam's mind like a door opening and closing, and it was the camper, reeking with blood and over it -- Craig's face.

He crouched there in the passenger seat while Mason leaned back in the driver's seat, still watching him, and he strove desperately to reach the new cop again. Who -- no, *what* -- was that guy?

But nothing came. Craig shifted in his seat. It was time to turn the oil truck around and he did that thing. Somehow the fuddled driver made it up the off ramp and got on again, heading south.

Craig caught a vision of his own face again above a flaming wreck. 'Get out!' he whispered hoarsely and Mason jumped.

So did Sam the cop in his car down the road.

Craig began to scream obscenities silently, drawing on the accumulated hatred of a lifetime, battering at the other man.

Sam recoiled, whimpering, and McKenzie kept saying stuff like, 'What is it?' and 'Are you sick?' and finally they pulled over about three miles up the road. The oil truck would pass them soon...

'What the hell are you muttering about?' Mason hissed to Craig while, behind them, Prescott began to snore.

Shut up, Craig told them both subvocally. Slow down, he told the truck driver as the oil truck passed McKenzie and Sam.

'It's time to go,' he said aloud, keeping his voice steady. 'You gonna wake Prescott?' He rubbed one sweaty palm on his jeans and reached for the door handle.

Mason grunted and leaned over the seat to shake Prescott awake.

It was then Craig opened the door and spilled himself out on the verge. Beneath his foot a discarded Dr. Pepper can crumpled and there, about three feet further on, lay the driver of the camper. His name had been Norm and the blood around his throat was beginning to congeal. Already the ants were on him.

Mason, Craig said now, putting all the force he could muster into that subvocal message, the door is jammed. Jammed! All of them...

Craig told the driver of the oil truck to speed up now, as he ran up past a spill of litter, splashing through the mud at the base of a little water course. He began to climb the cutting.

Inside the camper, Mason threw himself desperately against the door, not stopping in his frenzied bewilderment to unlatch it.

About half a mile back, lights hazed and grew, seeming to weave about as though someone slept at the wheel. From across the divider, another trucker saw and tried frantically to hail the man on his CB.

Craig climbed, fairly scuttling up the hill, not caring as he cut and bruised his hands, his knees and elbows, even his forehead on the stone.

The light grew, blazed, and suddenly the crickets were drowned out in a rending crash, a giant Whump! A sudden hot wind rushed among the trees above, scorching the pines, tossing the oaks and hickories and gums.

Craig felt the air across his back and arms like a sudden sunburn, and below, truck and camper blazed up, roaring a turgid crimson column into the sky.

Mason was a final second of agony and madness before he inhaled his death. Prescott and the driver were nothing -- not even a whimper as they crisped and fell into sizzling pieces.

Craig turned away and continued to climb until...

A light was in his eyes, sudden confusion in his mind. McKenzie said, 'Hold it there, boy.'

Craig stopped, peering upward at this man he had never seen save on the screen of his questing thoughts. Dusty boots and dark uniform pants rose to a belt, holster empty. Above, sweat-rounded armpits, open collar and the grim, bleak face of the man who has seen it all...

Fall, Craig told him silently. Lose your footing and tumble down -- down over the highway.

McKenzie sweated, grimaced, and remained where he was. 'Come on up easy, boy,' he said. 'Slow...'

Craig came up. 'What is all this?' he blustered. 'Can't you see there's an accident down there?'

'I know,' McKenzie said slowly, 'what you are...'

Craig shrugged, seeing Sam back behind, a sick shadow. He was a new guy, alright -- young, too.

'Hey, Sam,' Craig said. 'How ya doin'??'

Sam did not answer, but Craig could feel the other man's stomach roiling with reaction.

'Okay,' Craig said, watching the pair. 'So you know. You think anybody is gonna believe you?'

'Sam here saw you,' McKenzie said. 'He's got second sight.'

'Shit,' Craig told him, covering up a sudden clench of fear in his middle. 'That crap won't hold up in court. Get you sent to the nuthouse...' Mentally, he jabbed at Sam, and the new man stiffened and looked sicker than ever.

'He's sensitive,' McKenzie said slowly. 'But I'm not. And I'm wide awake -- not like your other victims.'

Craig shrugged again. 'Okay. So take me in. What's the charge? Witchcraft?'

'I'm not gonna take you in,' McKenzie said, lowering the light.

'No jury would convict you. Especially if you started playing with their heads...'

Craig glanced from one to the other, suddenly uneasy. 'What're you gonna do then?' he asked.

'You can go,' McKenzie said.

Craig waited, a horrible certainty growing within him.

'Look, boy,' McKenzie said. 'You think you're the only one? You think we ain't run into your kind before?'

Craig shook his head. 'Never seen it in the papers,' he said. 'No, you're lyin'.' But they weren't -- he knew that. And it was as if the world had suddenly shifted -- as though his dark secret had become a cheap and common thing. Something he had treasured in his ignorance, thinking that of all the world's bright gifts, this warped thing had been vouchsafed to him alone...

For a moment, he was once more the skinny kid he had been, with rotting teeth and ill-smelling clothing, zits and the scars of zits. He had hidden behind the trailer when his mother's boyfriend came in drunk -- until he had learned what he could do.

He shook his head. 'No,' he said again. 'It ain't true...'

McKenzie shrugged. 'We got our ways of dealing with trash like you,' he said, and there was no fear, no hatred in his voice -- only a mild distaste. He sounded almost bored.

It was that dismissal of Craig's talent, of the evil he had wrought, of all he had been, that hurt him worse than anything else the lawman could have done.

'Run, boy,' McKenzie said.

As though caught in some fated nightmare, Craig turned and ran, crashing among the woods, startling a possum, nearly stepping on small scuttling things...

The last thing he heard before McKenzie's shots brought him down was the cop's laconic drawl: 'Standard procedure for your sor', boy. Saves a heap o' trouble.'





REAL TIME™

One of the ways we react to readers' suggestions is evident in this issue. Overwhelmingly, you've asked for more illustrations in 2AM. Not only are we giving you more illos in this issue, but we plan to continue the trend in issues to come! Please write and let us know what you think. We're always glad to hear from you.

Several readers criticised us for hiding our logo. 'Are you 2AM, Let the Nightmares Begin..., or Special Hallowe-e-e-en Issue? Or are you The Dark Corner?' We're 2AM, folks, and we'll try to make it known in future issues -- right up-front on the cover where you can see it. But we want our contributors, all of them, to get as much billing as the magazine. Without our contributors, 2AM is nothing: it would cease to exist. 2AM belongs to the writers and artists you find in our pages.

And we also wanted to keep our logo positioned at 2 o'clock on the cover. We thought that was appropriate (neat, too, in a special way). We thought it was the kind of thing Will Eisner would have done had we been able to afford his services as art director.

Please let us know what YOU want. We'll try to respond. Remember, the squeaky wheel gets the grease!

From David T. Pudewitts, Santa Fe, NM:

Long time no hear. What gives? I sent you some drawings and a story over 2 months ago and I realize I didn't enclose an S.A.S.E but a post card from ye would have been sufficient unto itself. What happened to 2AM?

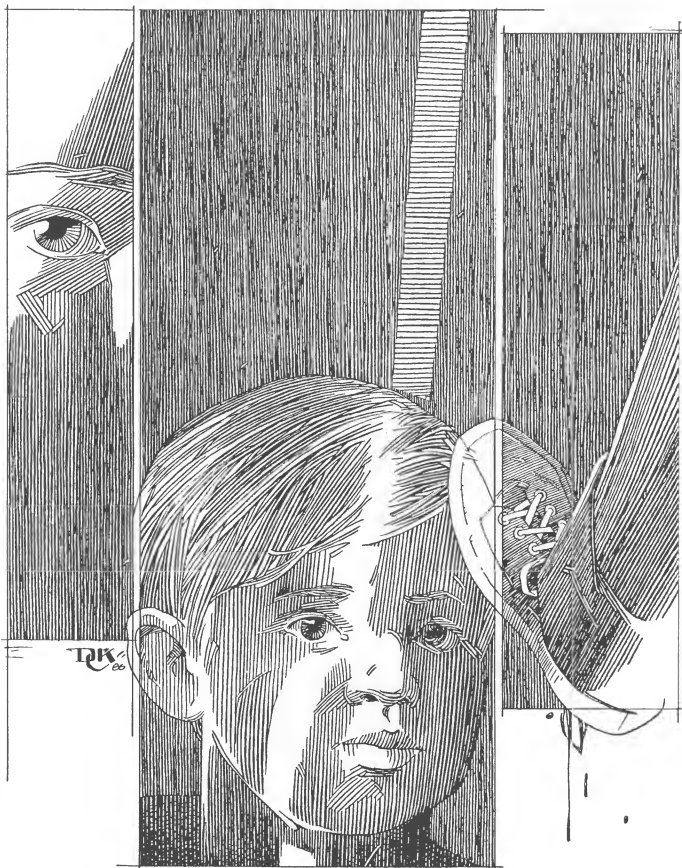
(Sorry, Dave. Believe it or not, our check for the drawings is in the mail. Personal and family illnesses have put us even more behind than the volume of submissions warrants. We thought we'd be caught up by now. But we seem to get further and further behind. Please bear with us. 2AM is alive and well [even if its editor isn't always]).

From John E. Ames, New Orleans, LA:

I'm happy about the birth of another quality magazine devoted to dark fantasy. I sincerely wish you and your staff a long and successful publishing future...Now I'm nit-picking, but I think the entertaining and prolific J. N. Williamson was incorrect in referring to a Robert R. McCammon story (published in the Winter 85 HORROR SHOW) as 'The Ice Cream Man.' Actually it's titled 'I Scream Man,' and that pun takes on poignant significance when the horrified reader realizes it's a nuclear holocaust [hollow cause -- ed.] tale.

(Thanks for the kind comments. And thanks for setting us straight on Rick McCammon's tale. You're right that the title is 'I Scream Man.' Our harried typesetter goofed good and even Paul Dale missed it in proofing. Don't blame Jerry, though. He had it right in the original manuscript).

Keep those cards and letters coming! You know the address. Don't you?



Children often take what we say too literally. Here's a sensitive little tale we find more frightening than words...

Things Not Seen

by James Robert Smith

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The little boy stood in the corner -- out of the couple's way -- and stared in wide eyed horror at the growing stain upon the kitchen floor. While the two busied themselves in preparing their supper, he watched as the black-red splotch welled up from the cracks between the shiny tiles. Why didn't they see? Why didn't they take note of the obscene puddle that continued to spread as they went about their pleasure?

It was obvious that they were too involved with what they were doing to notice. He just retreated even further into his corner, obeying that quote so often spoken at him: 'Children should be seen and not heard.' The child remained in the shadow near the pantry door and watched.

'Honey.' The man straightened from his task of searching for a dish beneath the counter. 'You'd better check the rolls. I think they should be done now.'

'Oh. Okay.' The young wife hurried across the kitchen floor to the oven. Child's eyes stared fixedly as she stepped directly into the crimson wet and made left-footed tracks wherever she moved. 'You are right,' she said, not seeing. She retrieved the fresh, warm bread and brought it in her mittened hands to the table. This time, her right foot was planted in the pooling stuff and she made another bloody trail across the kitchen.

Then the two were all a-flurry as they made their table ready. They moved from stove to sink to table; each time navigating the puddle. The child gazed in horrified wonder at the maze of tacky, red shoe prints that the others left behind them. The floor was a gory mess. And still, only he acknowledged it.

Finally, they were finished with their preparations and had seated themselves. The boy watched them from his hiding spot.

The woman's eyes played over the kitchen and dining area. 'Where's Sonny?' she asked.

'Oh, I fed him something earlier and he went out. I expect he's outside playing.' He smiled and looked hungrily at the meal before them. 'Dig in,' he said.

Together they ate, halting from time to time to comment on how good the food tasted or how nice the weather had been for their first, full day in their new home. They ate, cleared the table and washed the dishes together. They always shared the housework. Inside the pantry, one pair of eyes watched sickly as the creeping pool began to cool and thicken. In places, it had dried completely and was not affected as they strode upon it. In other spots, it squished under their tread.

In the middle of the floor they met on their ways to finishing their tasks of tidying up. They smiled and embraced.

'Oh, Bill, I love our new house! We were so lucky to find it!'

Bill squeezed his wife tightly. 'Well, I want you to be happy. We need a nice home to raise our family in.' He lifted his right arm and glanced at his watch. 'We'd better get ready for the Sims couple. They're supposed to be here in a few minutes.'

They went into the den. The child watched them go; their shoes were gooey with the stuff and their shins were speckled with droplets. They tracked across the neat, shag carpet. Bill went to the door and Annie set out a candy dish full of caramels and a shiny, unused ash tray. She hoped that neither of their new neighbors smoked; she hated the smell of cigarettes. Still, she felt that she must be hospitable to them.

'Do you think that they'll like Sonny?' Annie watched her husband at the door.

He half turned to her. 'Sure. Sure, they'll like Sonny. Why not?'

'Well, you know how some people are.' But she had to stop as their visitors came clattering up the front step to the porch. She'd have to remind Bill to fix that loose board.

For an hour, the four sat and socialized. Bill made an effort to steer the conversation away from politics and religion and did his best to find out about their new neighborhood. The evening was pleasant with talk of local shopping centers, car pools and other mundane affairs. The two men found a common fondness of duck hunting and the women shared an interest in country crafts. No one mentioned how the blood dried and flaked off their shoes.

A bottle of wine was brought out and the talk began to flow more freely and casually. Eventually, someone mentioned the house's former tenants.

'Y' know,' Mr. Sims said, 'we thought they were never going to put this place on the market.' He paused and gave the new neighbors a serious, squint-eyed stare. 'You do know about what happened here?' The women fell silent.

Bill fidgeted. The topic made him feel uncomfortable. 'Well, yes. We know a little. Though not as much as you do, I suppose.'

'The guy's name was Andersen. Al Andersen. Violent bastard. I reckon they had to wait until his sentence was carried out before they could put his house up for sale.'

'And his wife was such a sweet woman...' Mrs. Sims was interrupted by a whining and a scratching at the front door.

Bill stood and strode across the den. 'And this,' he announced, 'is Sonny.' He opened the screen and the big, blond dog trotted in, tongue hanging and tail wagging. There was a sniff for each of the guests before he plopped himself down at Annie's feet.

They all stared blankly for a moment, out of words.

'Was there anyone else?' Annie asked.

'What do you mean?' It was Mr. Sims.

'The Andersens. Besides Al Andersen and his wife. Was there anyone else?'

'Yes,' Mrs. Sims answered, her words very low and hard to hear. She was remembering a playful young voice and appreciated gifts of homemade cookies. 'They had a sweet, little child. A little boy.'

Inside the pantry, beneath the low shelves where he was trying to hide, the boy crouched and waited for the brute.

James Lee's article "War on Imagination" in our last issue prompted a flood of letters. We wish we had space to print all your comments, and maybe someday we will. Meanwhile, here is another installment in the continuing saga of the Ultimate Battle -- The Pen Versus The Sword...

"War on Imagination" Feedback

by Edgar F. Tatro

I wear many hats as a defender of imagination. I wield many swords as a soldier against fundamentalists and other organized Orwellian mind and morality controllers.

As a veteran english teacher of specialized elective courses such as 'science fiction, mystery and horror' and 'satire and comedy,' I am an enthusiastic promoter of offbeat literature and creative writing. I envision a teacher as one who takes his students on an experience that they couldn't have taken alone. I consider myself a tour guide to imaginative worlds created by masterful word magicians. Hopefully, by careful literary analysis, I help students become better readers and writers themselves.

Now I am keenly aware that a thin, amorphous region, riddled with heated controversy, exists between what is considered acceptable educational material and what is judged as utterly blasphemous, all depending upon the backgrounds of those judging. However, academic freedom IS the mainstay of vibrant education and student motivation. Thinking, imagining, doubting, and wishing are not crimes or sins except in Orwell's 1984 and other facsimiles of Big Brotherhood.

As a teacher of media and propaganda, my goal is to mold my students into critical thinkers by exposing the many fallacies inherent in our society every day (ad hominem, band wagon, circular reasoning, false cause, selected preference, hasty generalization, defective appeals to authority, force, pity, ignorance, and integrity, etc). By analyzing such illogical concepts, as well as slanted or loaded writing and speaking, students are given the opportunity to fairly and objectively appraise the sacred cows of values, politics, heritage, history, television rhetoric, and religion.

To do less is to condition them like mindless sheep on a path to pathetic oblivion. Fundamentalists who try to limit the knowledge, imagination and critical thinking of their offspring (and perhaps everyone else if they could get away with it), deserve a special place in hell assuming there is one. The encouragement, by any means, of brainwashing human beings is an unpardonable act.

Hypocrisy is alive and well in the fundamentalist movement. The greatest crimes are committed in the name of morality. The greatest sins are committed in the name of the Lord.

As a published writer of science fiction, mystery and horror, I am particularly unnerved by James Lee's essay, 'War on Imagination.' It is difficult enough trying to obtain some modest success within our strange little nest of the macabre without being attacked by pseudo-

elite morality mongers hovering like parasitic condors over my precious manuscripts. Since I often teach my own stories in school, I feel doubly threatened by these neanderthal goons wearing blinders.

As a published researcher of the conspiratorial aspects of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, perhaps the last true political champion of education for the masses, I have confronted the same kind of right wing fanaticism hiding smugly behind a facade of clever stonewalling, national security, evidentiary mutilation, evidentiary fabrication, and blatant falsehoods, all in the name of truth and justice. The concepts and motivations lurking beneath political coverups and the War on Imagination have been given birth with the same ugly roots in common.

Finally, as a father I want my little girl to receive a well-rounded education. I want her to be allowed to stretch her imagination. I want her to be open-minded, strong-willed, value-oriented and considerate of others. I want her to do unto others as she would want them to do unto her. Regarding faith, what she wants to believe will be her decision...but don't ever stifle her imagination.

This is not to say that I have no concerns about lack of censorship. In fact, I have often written about my concern that freedom can cause abuse of freedom. Also as a lecturer of subliminal influences, backward masking messages, and peer pressure conditioning tactics employed in drug-oriented and satanic-oriented rock and roll albums, I am sensitive to the subject matters with which our children are unnecessarily bombarded.

The difficulty is determining which concepts are harmful and which are constructively thought provoking. There is no simple solution and although it is important to make our elected officials properly represent our wishes, I have virtually no faith in most politicians. Most extremes are detrimental to any society and I will conclude by saying that the fundamentalist movement is one extreme we can all do without. Keep up the good fight, James A. Lee!

The above letter was mailed to 2AM on October 28, 1986, more than a month before Attorney General Edwin Meese was forced to turn his attention away from censorship and direct his efforts to more immediate political concerns: the Iran-Contra arms deal coverup investigation.

We find Mr. Tatro's suggestion that 'The concepts and motivations lurking beneath political coverups and the War on Imagination have been given birth with the same ugly roots in common' particularly appropriate.

We welcome your comments.

---Gretta and Paul Dale

We gratefully acknowledge the editorials in recent issues of ROD SERLING'S TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine, NIGHT CRY, and ESPIONAGE as decisive blows in the fight for freedom. The time to speak out is NOW! Now, while we still can....



*News and views of Small Press Publications,
Organizations, and People by IRWIN M. CHAPMAN*

With heavy heart and tears in my eyes, I want to eulogize the demise of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW (SFR). Edited by Richard E. Geis, formerly of Galaxy Magazine, now a famous SF writer on his own (well, with some help from his Alter Ego and Elton T. Elliott), SFR has been a Force For Good in the sf world for more than two decades. Now, it is (boo ho!) gone for good.

Geis himself is still around in the form of THE NAKED ID (PO Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211). Orson Scott Card is publishing SHORT FORM (546 Lindley Rd, Greensboro, NC 27410, \$10.00 per year). And Darrell Schweitzer (Darrell is EVERYWHERE this year, writing books, editing books, reviewing books, appearing in TZ and NIGHT CRY) is a literary agent along with George Scithers and John Betancourt, formerly of AMAZING. Gene DeWeese is now reviewing for MYSTERY SCENE. And Paulette Minare' is doing reviews in THE NAKED ID, Charles de Lint is reviewing in SHORT FORM, and Neal Wilgus is doing things for SCAV and FANTASY REVIEW.

I'm not crying for any of the contributors to SFR. They all have jobs, in some cases better paying jobs than they had at SFR. I'm crying for the readers of SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW: for the several thousand hard-core readers and fans who depended on SFR to provide news, reviews, and occasional slug-fests between pros (or between fen, or between pros and fen). Something wonderful has faded from our lives and we feel it. Deeply.

Such is life.

Please DO NOT confuse SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW with SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE. SFC (edited by Andrew Porter, Algol Press, PO Box 4175, New York, NY 10163-4175, 1 yr \$23.40) is the 'Monthly SF and Fantasy Newsmagazine.' SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE (SFC) is not only alive and well, Andy Porter has managed to pay off the printing debt owed on STARSHIP/ALGOL and can continue to publish SFC without a cloud of disrepute or even doom hanging over his head. Andy does a nice job with SFC. If you're not already a subscriber, you should be.

Exit one zine, enter another. Paul Olson has launched HORROR-STRUCK: The World of Dark Fantasy. Boasting 'All horror, all the time, all the way,' HORRORSTRUCK will be published bi-monthly by Carruth Bay Press, 155 Surrey Drive - E, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. Charter subscriptions are available for \$15.00 (or \$29.00 for 2 years).

The Premier Issue of HORRORSTRUCK, due out in April or May of 87, features: a Ramsey Campbell interview, articles and columns by Dean R. Koontz, Gene Wolfe, Charles de Lint, Thomas F. Montealeone, Bob Weinberg, Stanley Wiater, and Bill Relling. Cover art is by J. K. Potter. If you miss this one, you'll kick yourself in years to come.

Another new magazine worth watching is PORTENTS. The 2nd issue came off the press in January, 87, and contains fiction by Elizabeth Massie, Robert Henderson, Bobby Warner, Kevin Speirs, David Daniel,

Kathleen Jurgens, Gerard Daniel Houarner, and David Starkey. Artwork is by Jim Garrison, Rodger Gerberding, Jeanette Hopper, and Dan Opalenik. Lisa Lepovetsky does movie reviews and Bill Rasmussen does book reviews. The first issue was good, the second issue better. The third issue will be even better yet, with an interview with Charles L. Grant. Single issues are \$3.50 from PORTENTS, Deborah Rasmussen, Editor, 12 Fir Place, Hazlet, NJ 07730. Write to Deb about back issues and subscription prices.

SPACE & TIME has been around as long as SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. But SPACE & TIME is stronger and better than ever. Issue #71, Winter 87, features Rick Parks, Richard M. Shelly, John Berry, Kristine K. Thompson, Kevin J. Anderson and Patricia M. Spath, and dozens of other pro (or semi-pro) writers, poets, and artists. Anyone who enjoys 2AM will also enjoy SPACE & TIME. Gordon Linzer and Jani Anderson are editors. Single copies are 4 bucks. Subscriptions are 2/\$7.50 or 4/\$14.00. Order from Space & Time, 138 W. 70th St (4B), New York, NY 10023-4432.

Also from SPACE & TIME (same address) are two trade paperbacks definitely worth mentioning: Joe R. Lansdale's DEAD IN THE WEST (ISBN 0-917053-04-4, \$6.95) and John Eric Holmes' THE MAZE OF PERIL (ISBN 0-917053-05-2, \$6.95). Lansdale is rapidly becoming a Big Name in the horror business (he also has a considerable reputation as an author of espionage tales and westerns). DEAD IN THE WEST is well written and lots of fun. It belongs on every horror lover's bookshelf.

THE MAZE OF PERIL is of more interest to D&D® enthusiasts than sf or horror fans, though the Dagonites -- creatures part human, part frog -- may be leftovers from H. P. Lovecraft's nightmares. Actually, this is pretty decent pulp fantasy. And Dr. Holmes has a pretty decent sense of humor that pops up now and then, too. Try it. You might even like it.

Lansdale's DEAD IN THE WEST also appears (Chapter 3, at least) in Chrispin Burnham's ELDRITCH TALES #12. ELDRITCH TALES has become a legend in its own time, featuring stories, poetry, reviews and artwork by some of the best fantasy workers around. Perfect bound, very professionally packaged, ELDRITCH TALES is a dream come true. It's easy to see why this Small Press zine is often nominated for awards. The only gripe I've ever heard about ELDRITCH TALES is that it isn't published often enough to suit its readers or contributors. Well worth the \$6.00 cover price. \$6.00 per copy, \$20.00 for 4 issues. Published irregularly. Order from Chrispin Burnham, ELDRITCH TALES, 1051 Wellington Rd, Lawrence, KS 66044.

And catch Lansdale's story "The Fat Man" in the January 87 issue of THE HORROR SHOW. Lansdale has been a regular columnist in THIS for years. This issue also marks his final "The Lansdale House of Horror" in the pages of THIS. Edited by David B. Silva, Phantasm Press, 14848 Misty Springs Ln, Oak Run, CA 90069, THE HORROR SHOW begins its fifth consecutive year of quarterly publication. Besides Joe R. Lansdale, the January issue features fiction by Beth Massie, Peter Heyrman, David Daniel, Bentley Little, Poppy Z. Brite, A. R. Morlan, and Paul F. Olson (the same Paul Olson who edits HORRORSTRUCK). There's also an interview with Lansdale, story ideas from the notebook of J. N. Williamson, a chilling comic-art page called "Cold Christmas" and a TV outline by William F. Nolan. And, since this is a special J. K. Potter issue, there's a special pull-out centerfold section of Potter art (plus a magnificent Potter cover and an in-depth interview

with the artist conducted by Paul F. Olson). Single issues are \$3.95 on newsstands or \$4.95 direct from Phantasm Press. Subscriptions are \$14.00 for 4 issues, \$26.00 for 9 issues. You can't beat that deal anywhere (especially with all the extras Dave Silva throws in)!

Bill Nolan has often been called a 'Renaissance Man' and no one seems to deserve the title more than Nolan. Author of LOGAN'S RUN, LOGAN'S WORLD, and LOGAN'S SEARCH (combined into a new single-edition from MacLay & Associates, PO Box 16253, Baltimore, MD 21210), William F. Nolan is also an accomplished illustrator. Now we learn he is also a poet.

DARK ENCOUNTERS (Dream House, 1986, limited to 250 copies, distributed by The Strange Company, PO Box 864, Madison, WI 53701) is the first collection of Nolan's poetry. In a 4 page introduction, Nolan explains the personal motivations behind each of the poems in this thin volume. The introduction alone is worth the price of the book.

But the poems themselves are surprisingly good for a man who writes only 'perhaps one or two' poems a year. Nolan is, after all, a communicator. And he manages to communicate emotions as well as -- or better than -- most full-time poets.

A very pleasant surprise that hit my mailbox in October is a one-shot zine that might become more than a one-shot. NOT ONE OF US is 'a collection of stories, poetry, and artwork about people out of place in their surroundings.' Edited by John M. Benson (also editor of DOPPELGÄNGER), NOT ONE OF US has Wayne Allen Sallee's sequel to 'Rapid Transit' ('Take the A Train'), a truly tremendous tale by William Relling, Jr ('Chiaroscuro'), and a sequel to Dan Crawford's story in the Premier Issue of 2AM ('Tens Around and Both Nine of Trump'). Other contributors include Ken Wisman, George Foss, Marge Simon, Ronny Kaye, G. Wayne Miller, Erskine Carter, Malcolm Morris, Scott C. Virtes, Alarice Breidert, Bobby Warner, D. M. Vosk, Albert Manachino, Sue Marra, John Del Gaizo, Anke Kriske, and John Benson. Order from Benson at 44 Shady Lane, Storrs, CT 06268 (\$3.50 plus .75 postage).

Another great magazine I want to tell you about: BORDERLAND. Published periodically (once or twice a year, it seems) at 7305 Woodbine Ave, Suite 517, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 3V7, BORDERLAND looks as professional as THE HORROR SHOW. This is a very slick, very commercial seeming zine. Many of the stories are by established pros. The entire contents is typeset. Graphic layout is attractive. If you want to subscribe, send \$8.50 (US) or \$10.50 (Canadian) to Dragon's Hoard, 97 Donnamora Crescent, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada L3T 4K6. I highly recommend BORDERLAND. Issue #5 should be in print by the time you read these words. Order a single copy from Weinberg Books and see for yourself how professional the small press can be.

Speaking of professional, I want to say a few words about Bridge Publications and L. Ron Hubbard's legacy. Most of you already know Hubbard sponsored L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future Contest and Bridge publishes an annual anthology of contest winners. Bridge also publishes Hubbard's DIANETICS and various Hubbard Scientology spin-off texts. But did you know that Bridge publishes Hubbard's monumental 10 volume 'Dekalogy' titled L. Ron Hubbard's MISSION EARTH?

The sixth volume has just been released. Like THE INVADERS PLAN, BLACK GENESIS, THE ENEMY WITHIN, AN ALIEN AFFAIR, FORTUNE OF FEAR, and Hubbard's earlier bestseller BATTLEFIELD EARTH, DEATH QUEST is easy reading. You can say anything you want about L. Ron Hubbard, but you must admit the man was a master storyteller.

There are those who bad-mouth Hubbard by calling him a pathological liar. Maybe he was. But being a pathological liar isn't all that bad, at least from a writer's viewpoint.

I've been a Hubbard fan since discovering 'Fear' in an early issue of John Campbell's UNKNOWN. 'Fear' is the only story I've ever read that literally gave me the shakes! I mean, it's gotta be one of the most powerful stories ever written. Either that, or Hubbard managed to find the exact wavelength of my subconscious and played a number without my noticing.

But either way, I admit Hubbard's genius.

Like all writers, Hubbard was best when he cranked out tons of words incessantly. For several decades, Hubbard was one of the most prolific writers around (writing westerns, sf, horror, and even romances). In the days of the pulps, he was one of the highest paid writers around, too. Campbell was under standing orders from the owners of Street and Smith Publications to buy everything Hubbard submitted.

And then, in the early 50's, Hubbard gave up writing for pennies a word and devoted all his time to investigating the way the world and the human mind really worked.

Though I know nothing about Scientology, the religion Hubbard started by writing DIANETICS, I do know that Hubbard believed that man could control his own destiny through use of his mind. Hubbard proved it worked in his own life, proved it by his own successes.

Bridge Publications promises to publish a Hubbard biography in the near future, something I'm looking forward to reading. And after that...they promise to release all of Hubbard's early works, some of which have been out of print for decades, in new volumes. That's also something I'm looking forward to reading. I promise to let you know when they're released.

But back to MISSION EARTH.

In the early volumes Hubbard appears to be re-learning his craft. After being away from the typewriter for nearly 30 years, it took thousands of words before he could find the right voice. But Hubbard was a pro. He kept hacking out the words until everything fell into place. Before long he had millions of words and his voice was back.

MISSION EARTH is pure pulp fiction, the kind of thing Hubbard was best at writing. It was intended to entertain and enthrall. In short, it was written to sell.

And sell it does. Each volume has made every bestseller list I've seen.

Be sure to buy a copy of the next issue of 2AM. I'll have more to say next issue about Hubbard, Bridge Publications, Writers of the Future, and literary professionalism.

PUBLISHERS: Please send review copies to Irwin Chapman at 2AM, PO Box 50444, Chicago, IL 60650-0444



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And much more!!!!

edited by Gretta McCombs Anderson

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